

IS THERE A GOD?



R. ROBERTS

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BY

ROBERT ROBERTS

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PREFACE

The contents of this book appeared originally in Serial form in *Good Company* published by Robert Roberts. In an informal conversational manner it discusses the subject in such a way as to strengthen conviction in the reality of God. And without such faith "it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh unto Him must believe that He is (*esti*); and that He becomes (*ginomai*) a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

The author draws upon the evidence of logic and fact to answer his question in the affirmative. He shows that the theory of evolution is an impossibility in view of the evidence of creation, and the marvellous purpose in everything related thereto. The mechanism of the human frame, the wonderful construction of the eye argues the existence of thought and planning in forming such, and therefore the existence of One greater than creation. It is the fool that argues to the contrary, reasoned the Psalmist (Psa. 14:1). But it should be noted that the Psalmist is not relating this to the atheist, but to the superficial believer, whose lack of conviction makes him such. It is in "his heart" that he speaks thus; not externally. To him God is not real; so though he mouths platitudes of religion, he does not give any practical de-

monstration of his belief. There were many such in Israel of old, and it led God to say to Moses: "Truly I live, and all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh" (Num.14:21).

How important, then, to strengthen our faith in the reality of God, that we may manifest our conviction in daily living. The book in the hands of the reader can assist him to that end, by reasoning the fact of God's existence in an unusual manner. It sets aside the evolutionary concept as being entirely unrealistic, and failing to measure up to the basic facts of creation and existence. Setting the theories of man aside, recognising the reality of God, reason compels one to acknowledge the authenticity of His revelation. And in the Bible is discovered a storehouse of divine truth that can help us now to fit us for the future. It is supernatural in origin; eternal in duration; inexpressive in value infinite in scope; Divine in authorship; regenerative in power; infallible in authority; universal in interest; personal in application, and impressing on every page and witnessing through every prophecy the reality of God.

— H. P. Mansfield
June, 1983

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IS THERE A GOD?

Chapter 1

THE REPRODUCTIVE FACULTY INDICATIVE OF PURPOSE

MAN, there must be. You ask, Why?—Because creation shews purpose.

Do you mean design?—Not exactly. Design and purpose are no doubt the same thing in some connections; but I use “purpose” in a sense different from the meaning usually attached to “design” in arguments about God. I mean a purpose invested in creation itself.

I don’t understand you.—Well, look here: when men say creation shews design, they mean that it is so wisely made that it must have had a maker: that as the hand is so exactly adapted for prehension, it must have had an adapter: that as the eye is so exquisitely contrived for sight, it must have had a contriver.

Well, isn’t that what you mean?—No.

What do you mean?—I mean that creation shews a purpose that it should be carried on.

You are no more lucid than before.—Well, see; I am referring to the capacity for re-production attaching to every plant and animal under the sun. You know the contention of the Evolutionist: that the various existing forms of life have been evolved and shaped through what might be called the stress of necessity blindly acting upon them through circumstances; thus, the birds are supposed to have gradually got their wings through wanting to fly: and the fishes their fins through wanting to swim; and men their legs and arms through wanting to walk and handle things: and so on. Exercise is supposed to have developed them more and more through long ages.

There are tremendous difficulties in the way of these suppositions; *e.g.*, how could a wing exercise itself in flying till it was a wing, and how did it become a wing in the first place? But, nevertheless, in a rough way, it is barely conceivable (at least as a hypothesis) that life has been developed by blind necessity, acting without purpose or intelligence in the stupendous laboratory of the universe, through the exigency of what is called "environment." But how can the mechanism of re-production be brought into this conception? Re-production has no relation to the creature itself. It has reference to successors. It is a thing of futurity. It cannot be the product of "environment." There is no necessity in the creature itself that it should be replaced by a similar form of life when it dies. There is no acting tendency, therefore, such as Evolutionists suppose have blindly produced fins, wings, arms, legs, etc. Yet here is the fact, that every form of life, animal and

vegetable, is endowed with a mechanism of re-production which it does not require for its own use. Here is evidence of *a purpose* that living creation should be perpetuated. On no principle recognized by Evolution can the existence of this re-productive apparatus be accounted for. It not only exists in all forms of organized life, but in the very earliest forms, and in forms so simple that the supposed law of evolution has not had time to develop it, supposing such a thing could be developed by Evolution—that is, by the pressure of necessity. It is provision for futurity; it is the indication of purpose. The purpose is embodied in things as they are. This goes deeper than what is called “the Design argument.” Consider it well. The more you think of it, the more it will shew you the truth of what I said at the start. There must be a God. Here is His manifest footprint. Evolutionists exclude “purpose” from the action of their “force”; and here *is* “purpose”—a purpose that the forms of life produced shall be re-produced.

But what do you mean by God?—It does not matter what specific view I may desire to express by that term. I believe in the God revealed in the Bible, but it is sufficient for my present argument if I say that by God I mean *Intelligence somewhere operative through power*. The study of Nature cannot inform us of the seat or nature of this intelligence; but it is a great matter that it shews us its existence which it undoubtedly does in the particular which I press upon your attention. Revelation does the rest.

There is force in what you say; but there is something I can never get over.

What is that?—This: if the existence of

contrivance proves a contriver, then, call that contriver what you like; he also must have been contrived, because his power to contrive must be the highest contrivance of all.

There, my good friend, you reason smartly, but not soundly.

Where is the flaw?—In the assumption that the eternal power of contrivance must have been contrived. That which has always been cannot have been contrived.

But how do I know it has always been?—Consider, my friend; the initial power of all—what our modern scientific friends call “the primordial force,” must have always been—*MUST*: there is no escape from this. Consider!

Well, suppose I admit it?—Then its capacities, whatever they are (and creation shews them stupendous in wisdom and power) cannot have been contrived.

Very well then, here are wisdom and power without contrivance.—Granted.

Well, why may it not be so in the smaller things you speak of?—Because, my friend, it self-evidently is not so. Take the smallest mollusc; will you affirm that power and wisdom are in it, to make itself; and that it has always been? You cannot do so. Therefore, there must be power and wisdom exterior to the mollusc to account for it. The proof of contrivance it contains must in its case involve a contriver, because it has come into existence and could not have contrived itself. But by what argument would you make eternal power and wisdom evidence of eternal power and wisdom before it? Besides, look at the dilemma you are in. If it is to be an objection to believe in God that He could not

make Himself, why do you find it so easy to believe that the finite objects of creation have created themselves, by however slow a process? If you can believe that things that have had a beginning and that shew marks of an intelligence exterior to themselves, have been equal to the amazing feat of self-contrivance, you ought to be able to receive the simpler and more apparently inevitable conclusion that self-existent eternal power and wisdom (centralized in the Father, revealed by Christ) is the efficient Cause of all things. *Man, there must be a God; and man, by the Bible and history and many other things when fairly studied, we may see clearly there is.*

Chapter 2

EVERY FACULTY PROVES THE EXISTENCE OF ITS OBJECT: THEREFORE GOD

Have you digested the argument I gave you last time?—I have been chewing it: I cannot say I have digested it.

You find it somewhat eatable, then; or at least not quite uneatable?—Well, there is force in it: great force, I must confess.

I feel certain you must find it conclusive. If purpose is proved, God is proved. The power of reproduction proves "purpose" as distinct from design. Design, as usually conceived, is the present adaptation of a thing to a use, but the capacity of reproduction points to futurity, and therefore to purpose concerning it.

You said there were many other proofs of God's existence.—Yes, many.

Are they of equal force to the reproduction argument?—I think so. Here is one. Every faculty proves the existence of its object. The

stomach proves the existence of food, even if food cannot be obtained. The ear proves the existence of sound, even though there may be dead silence. So, the nose proves the existence of odour; the eye, the existence of light; the lungs, the existence of breath, and so on. These are what may be called gross illustrations of the argument, but they yield a principle having a powerful application to God.

I do not see how you can apply it to God.—The illustrations I have used have to do with bodily faculties and what you might call material things; but it applies to the desires and capacities of the mind, as well as to what we may call the appetites of the body. There is the power to observe, the power to reason, the power to calculate, the capacity to fear, to love, to hope: all these are innate in the human constitution, though their development is a question of exercise. Now, each of these proves the existence of its corresponding object, even if the person possessing these powers and capacities is cut off from access to all of those objects. Thus, the capacity to fear proves the existence of danger in the abstract; the capacity to love proves the existence of other persons than ourselves; the capacity to calculate proves the existence of numbers; the power to observe and reason proves the existence of objects and events and laws exterior to the faculty itself. We should reason correctly of the existence of these things from the possession of those powers, even if it were so cut off from the external world (perpetually immured in a dark dungeon, say) as to have no actual knowledge of their existence.

How do you apply it to God?—In this way. We have a group of faculties that all indicate Him as plainly as love indicates man. We have the capacity

to venerate and adore the higher than ourselves; the tendency to place faith in that which is more able than ourselves; the power of infinite hope in a direction above and beyond ourselves; and the faculty to recognize obligation to higher authority than ourselves. Veneration, conscientiousness, faith, and hope are the highest and noblest features of the human mentality. Phrenologically, they are seated in the very centre and apex of the brain, highest in the being—looking away to heaven (as we might say), telling us of God, even if we had no evidence otherwise of His existence. They lead to devotion, prayer, worship, and moral heroism. They all point to God. They have no adequate object apart from Him. When applied to man, they wither and die. My argument, put into a sentence, would take this shape—That the higher faculties of the human brain prove the existence of God, as plainly as the human eye proves the existence of light.

I do not think the facts are consistent with your argument.

In what way are they inconsistent?—Well, food, light, and other things of which you have spoken, are all accessible, and they are matters of experience with the common run of men. But God is not in the experience of any.

Wait a moment, my friend. Is light a matter of experience with the blind?—I must admit not, of course.

Is food a matter of experience with the new-born babe thrown out to die of exposure? You must give the same answer. Yet the eye is there, proving the light, though never seen; and the stomach is there, proving the food, though never tasted. Now suppose all men were blind and starving, the fact

would be no argument against the existence of light and food.

But you see they are not all blind.—No, but they might be. It is possible in the abstract; and you must admit the possibility, to see the bearing of the argument. Universal blindness would not disprove the light, which would be proved by the universal sightless eye-balls. It has sadly to be granted that God is not a common experience with men; but we must not use this fact as a disproof of God, if it should appear that the cause lies in some special circumstance that is at war with the native constitution of things. My argument is, that man's latent capacity for God is a proof of God's existence, even if we might not be able to explain why we are shut off from Him, which the Bible enables us to do.

My difficulty is about the "latent capacity." I do not see much of this latent capacity in the bulk of men with whom I have any acquaintance. In 99 cases out of 100, I see no capacity at all. The vast majority are content to be without God. Indeed, it would be uncongenial to have God obtruded upon them in any way.—No doubt what you say is true, but it does not affect the argument; because the argument does not require that every man has the superior faculties in an active state. If any, however few, have them in that state, it is enough to prove the existence of the object of those faculties. Disuse may sink a faculty almost out of being, as in the case of barbarians, who have no sense of right and wrong, no appreciation of the beautiful, no ear for music. The moral faculties have been in comparative disuse among all nations for ages, due to the revealed fact that God, having hid His face, has left them to look after themselves. As the result

of disuse, the bulk of the population are in the state you describe, but there is "a remnant" with whom it is different—in whom the moral faculties are in an active state. Consider their case fully, and you will find the argument fully sustained—that God's existence is evident from the mental constitution of the human race when developed to the level of its normal type.

Chapter 3

THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE

Have you found any flaw in the argument as to our mental constitution indicating God?—Not exactly a flaw, but I thought that you had skipped an argument that was weightier, and that was under your hand.

What was that?—You spoke of adaptation between our faculties and the various objects on which they act. It struck me that this adaptation is a powerful evidence of God, for how could such an adaptation exist if there were not a higher power to cause it?

Yes, there is force in that: but the unbeliever could evade it by suggesting that our faculties are a natural development from the objects on which they operate—such as the eye from the light, and its disappearance in creatures that live in the dark.

But he could not maintain that, could he?—No; except as a hypothesis, but, even then, it would leave last month's argument for God untouched; because

if the seeing faculty is due to the existence of light, the worshipping faculty must be due to the existence of God. I prefer to use arguments that cannot be taken in the rear, so to speak.

That is the best sort of argument no doubt. Do you think of any other?—There is another argument that is very powerful, but it deals with such a vast aspect of things that it is difficult to handle. It is one of those sort of arguments that is almost too ponderous to be useful.

What can it be? I should like to hear it.—Well, it deals with the origin of the universe.

Ah, that is a vast theme, indeed.—Vast, unutterably vast: beyond us—infinite—yet challenging our attention: for here the universe is, a thing of parts and measurements and order, although a thing infinite. It is impossible to dismiss the problem of its existence.

The fashionable way now is to refer it all to “Evolution”?—Yes, that is the word, but what does it mean?

It means the slow development or improvement of things from point to point, by exercise, does it not?—That is something like the meaning, but it by no means excludes the argument for God, even if it were a true theory. Evolution would still need God for the explanation of itself.

I should like to see that shewn.—The proof is very simple when you turn the subject over in your mind. Supposing Evolution (for the sake of argument) to be true, there must have been a time going back far enough, when nothing had been evolved—when sun, moon, and stars were but an undeveloped potentiality. Now, suppose we go back to such a time, and imagine ourselves onlookers.

There would be nothing to see, of course; but the force or power now incorporate in the splendid frame of the universe must have existed. Without this, nothing could have ever come at all—manifestly. There must have been a space-filling ocean of invisible energy or force, out of which the universe afterwards came, even if it was by evolution. Now here is an inevitable conclusion: at whatever point of time the process of evolution began, there must have come upon the scene a new impulse of some kind to start it.

Why must we suppose that?—Think of it, and you must see. At whatever point of time the process may be imagined to have commenced, there must have been time before then—time without beginning—necessarily: and the problem to be faced is this: Why did not the evolving process begin in these previous ages of time, instead of just when it did? If a new condition came upon the scene, there is an answer. Otherwise, there seems no reason why the quiescence of antecedent eternity should not have continued. The problem is real and persistent. How came Evolution to begin? How came potentiality to stir? Must not something have come upon the scene at the moment of the stirring which was not before at work? Must not an impulse have begun to move which was not moving before? Must not the previously sleeping “force” have begun to vibrate with a formative stimulus not previously active? What could this be but the volition of intelligent power? Even Evolution you see does not dispense with the necessity for a First Cause. Something like the Mosaic start took place even on the Evolutionist hypothesis. A creative impulse is a mathematical necessity, to account for things as they are. There is a deeper philosophy, than is commonly

imagined, in the words of Paul: "The invisible things of Him are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead."

You speak as if Darwinism might be admissible after all?—I do so only as a matter of argument. My aim is to shew that, even if that system were accepted, it does not get rid of God. It only makes the process of His work slower.

It is imagined that the Darwinism process is more conceivable to the human intellect.—As to that, both Mosaic and Darwinian are inconceivable. The beginning of things, in either case, is equally out of range of the human intellect. But there is a great difference between the two, in point of credibility and fitness. The Mosaic narrative comes to us with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and gives to us a Cause adequate to the effects which we see in heaven and earth,—an All-wise, All-powerful Intelligence, possessing, in Himself, all the power to exist, and all the capability of imparting that original formative initiative that the case requires; while Darwinism is a mere scientific guess, and asks us to believe that eternal force, without will or wisdom, has inexplicably evolved a system of things bearing marks of will and wisdom in their highest forms.

Chapter 4

THE APPEARANCE OF MAN UPON THE SCENE

THE appearance of man upon the earth is a sufficient proof of the existence of God, if you think it out.

How do you make that out?—How otherwise can you account for his appearance? He is here: go far enough back, and he was not here. Between these two points of time, a marvel must have occurred to cause his appearance. There must have been at work a Cause adequate to the production of such a creature—so full of wonderful faculty and untold capabilities of joy and sorrow—with all his weakness and baseness.

Might he not have come spontaneously?—If you say that, you throw us back on a still more difficult idea. The universe is full of power, but with all its stupendous and varied powers, you never meet with an effect without a cause—never. This has passed into one of the axioms of science, and justly so, for it cannot be contradicted. If man came spontaneously,

then the most wonderful phenomenon in the wide universe, so far as accessible to human observation, is an exception to all phenomena in being uncaused. Requiring most of all for its explanation some potent cause of wisdom and power, such an idea would give it the least. The idea is absolutely inadmissible. It is in opposition to logical necessity, and the teaching of experience. Have you ever heard of a man coming into existence uncaused?

I don't know that I have.

Did you ever hear of anyone that did?—I don't know that I did.

Where is there room then for the idea? There is absolutely none. It would contradict Nature and reason. It would propound a miracle far more stupendous than anything presented in revelation, for all the miracles of revelation are exhibited as the effects of a Cause; but the "spontaneous" idea would ask us to entertain the possibility of a miracle without a cause—the coming into existence of previously non-existent man, without a cause to bring him into existence.—It looks a little absurd, putting it that way, I must allow.

But that is the way of the thing, isn't it? The absurdity does not arise from any way of putting it.—Well, there is the idea that it came gradually.

You mean "Evolution." That would not soften the difficulty, as we have already seen. There must have been at the beginning of the evolution a Cause equal to what now exists. Here is a universe, bearing the stamp of matchless wisdom, both in its general form and in its minutest arrangements. It matters not whether it came quickly or slowly: it could not come wisely unless there was wisdom to help it along, and the seat of this wisdom must

from its nature be inscrutable. The science of our century recognizes this.

In what way?—They take refuge in the terms “force” and “unknowable” in their references to the initial power. If you consider this, it liberates the mind for the recognition of God. I mean that the recognition of God cannot be called unscientific, in view of the postulates of science. If “force” is to be recognized, though “unknowable,” there can be no obstacle to the recognition of God, though unknowable. If “force” is to be a sufficient explanation of what exists, obviously there can be no insufficiency in the idea of God. If the inscrutability of force is to be no objection, it cannot have any weight against God. So far as science is concerned, we are as much at liberty to accept God as to accept force.

Could we not say the same of force? Are we not as much at liberty to accept force as to accept God?—I think not. With God you have “force,” but with “force” you have not God. And God we must have. God is what you might call a mathematical necessity. Here is His work: wisdom and power are incorporate in the things we see, and they must have preceded these things.

I have been inclined to think kindly of the scientific view. God is so beyond our understanding.—My friend, my friend, consider. Is “force” within your understanding? Does science lessen the mystery of the universe?

I have a feeling that it does.—Ah! it is a mere feeling. Think deeply enough, and you will see that it increases the mystery instead of decreasing it. It gives us wise work on every hand, without wisdom anywhere to account for it—achievements of power, without power to achieve the achievements. It

presents us with the idea of passive, blind, mindless force, working out results that bespeak the potency of active, far-seeing, intelligent power. By whatever name people please to designate the Cause of the universe, that Cause (necessarily combining wisdom and power) is God, and nothing else. Whatever we may call it, we are in the presence of power and wisdom that cannot be understood.

In that case, it seems to me to matter little which view you adopt.—There is this great difference: one gives you God, and the other takes Him away. And there is also this difference: though both give us the inscrutable, one gives us what we might call an intelligible inscrutability, and the other, an inscrutability not at all intelligible.

I confess I don't follow you there.—Well, it is within the compass of our intelligence to understand how an Intelligent Being, containing in Himself all power and wisdom, could evolve, fashion, or create a universe, replete with all the arrangements of beauty and wisdom that we see. But it does not come within the compass of our intelligence to conceive of force that had no intelligent volition, working wisely, or, indeed doing anything at all. Scientific Agnosticism would give us in its so-called "force" a blind god that slept for ages, and then woke up without a cause, and worked wisely without knowing it and without wisdom: whereas the Bible gives us a God "who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will," and who, possessing all power and all wisdom, is an all-sufficient explanation of the things that are, however inscrutable His existence may be. The one inscrutability is intelligible: the other is unintelligible.

Well, there is force in what you say. It is a large

subject, but I think you have gone away from your text somewhat. It was to be man's appearance on the earth.—Yes; but the suggestion you made about spontaneous generation led to the larger argument. We may return to man the next time we meet.

Chapter 5

THE INCONSISTENCIES OF THE EVOLUTIONISTS VIEW

OUR larger arguments have certainly proved the existence of God. So really has the smaller one as to man's appearance on the scene.

You did not go into that.—Not minutely, but it was sufficiently indicated. Man now exists: once he had no existence. Nothing but exquisite power and wisdom could have brought such a being upon the scene. Briefly, that is the argument.

The doctrine of evolution has taken a good deal of the force out of that argument.—No doubt: with those who have received it. But that doctrine is far from being established.

It is generally received.—By a certain class, no doubt.

A large class!—Yes, a large class; nevertheless, it is a mere hypothesis with which many facts are entirely inconsistent: and as a matter of fact, a reaction has commenced against it.

What facts do you think of when you say they are inconsistent with Evolution.—Well, they are really numerous, but they may be grouped under two or three heads. First, if man is a development of lower

forms of life, there ought to be no lower forms of life now.

Why so?—Because if the force of the universe “evolves” by mechanical tendency, without discernment, discrimination or design, its evolution should march abreast. There ought to be no monkeys, no dogs, “no primordial germs,”—only men.

I don't see that. Surrounding circumstances have to do with the form and the extent of development. These circumstances, doubtless, exercise a natural selection. Grass under a stone for example does not grow like grass in the open. Circumstances may have so checked and favoured certain developments as to leave the lower forms behind while pushing on the higher till they ended in man.—Well, suppose we allow that for the sake of argument, how do you account for there being but one sort of man?

There are all sorts—black, brown, red, yellow, as well as white.—Ah, that is as regards colour or dissimilarities on the surface. But taking the thing fundamentally, all men have a head, two arms, a body, and two legs. None have horns; none have wings; none have tails.

Well, what of that?—Why, just this: if man is but the modification of lower forms through the action of circumstances, as there are all sorts of circumstances, there ought to be all sorts of men at all sorts of stages of development. There ought to be men capable of living in the water, because there are animals that can: the hippopotamus, to wit. There ought to have been men capable of flying in the air, for certainly they want to, and there are creatures that can. There ought to have been men with six, or eight, or twenty arms, like many-legged insects; for often, they would be very useful. There ought

to have been men with eyes at the back of their heads, or in their heels, or at the end of their fingers : for there are creatures among the smaller insects with eyes so distributed : and man very much wants eyes in other parts of his body beside those in front. That is as regards man. But see how the argument acts with regard to the animals. If man is but a development on the ascending scale of physiological activities, shaped and guided by the pressure of circumstances and necessities, of course the animals would have the full benefit of the same law. Why then have we no speaking animals ?

There are parrots.—Ah, but I mean creatures with the gift of speech—the power of expressing idea. It cannot be said that the animals have no necessity to speak. The necessity must often bear on them with all the force with which it is even supposed to have done in the case of man. Yet they are as destitute of this faculty as any tree of the forest. It ought not to be so on the Evolutionist hypothesis. There being every variety of circumstance and “environment,” there ought to be every variety of development : every form of creature : every state and kind of faculty. It is not so. There is an unbridgeable gap between the lowest human specimen and the highest animal. The facts are inconsistent with the theory. They are in perfect harmony with the conclusion I have been trying to establish from the beginning, *viz.*: that the true “force” of the universe is the Being of universal extension, revealed as the God of Israel, “who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will,” and who in His own wisdom, and by His own power, has fashioned heaven and earth and the countless creatures they contain, after the form and patterns in which we find them.

Chapter 6

THE EXISTENCE OF SEX A PROOF OF GOD

You remember our argument last time ?—Yes, it was defective, I think, on one point.

What was that ?—It disposed fairly of the idea of man being the evolution of a gradually ascending chain of development, but it did not allow for the possibility of man having spontaneously come into being under some chance combination of laws and forces, that produced a superior creature, not seen upon the earth before.

Oh dear! You will excuse me, I am sure, if I say that that strikes me as the most absurd of all wild suggestions to which atheistic pre-disposition has driven the cleverest of men.

Why should it strike you so ?—Because of its inconsistency with the fundamental axiom of this very class of men everywhere, an axiom on which they base all their objections to the evidences of Divine revelation having taken place, however strong. They lay down as a first principle, in their mode of

thought, that Nature is immutable in her ways, and that therefore miracle is impossible; and yet they ask us to believe that Nature has changed her mode of producing men.

Not that exactly, is it?—That is what it amounts to. She now produces them by generation, and the suggestion is that she first produced them by—what shall we call it? By freak?

Nay, not by freak, but by a special conjunction of forces.

An accident?—Well, it would be accidental, of course.

What evidence is there of such an accident having occurred?—None that I know of: there is only the fact that man is here, and that once he was not here. And if there is no God, he must have come by accident.

But if there was no God at the beginning, there is no God now; and Nature being immutable in her operations, the accident ought to happen now—Not necessarily.

What? Think. Has Nature lost her power then, to produce a man by spontaneous generation? No, no; Nature has lost nothing. What she has done, she can do. If she produced man at the beginning in the way suggested, it is no extravagance to insist that she ought to do so now. Did you ever hear of a case?—Of course I never have.

A man, whose mother should be the rock or peat-bog, and his father the sun's rays, or some other blind energy?—You put the thing too extremely.

Nay, nay. That is just what it would be, wouldn't it, if it happened. What other mode do you conceive in the case?—Oh, I do not make myself

responsible for the suggestion at all. I place it before you as a hypothesis to be dealt with.

Yes, but a hypothesis must have some shape and features before you can deal with it. It is not a hypothesis. It is a wild venture. Would not such a thing be a miracle if it happened, which the very men suggesting it declare themselves incapable of receiving?—Ah, but a miracle is what God is supposed to do.

Oh, and this would be a thing that did itself! Why, that would be a greater miracle still?—The difficulty is about God, you see.

But you have the difficulty if you put away God. You have more difficulty without Him than with Him: is it not so?—Well, I am not championizing the atheistic view.

It is a senseless view altogether, the more and more you think of it. Look at this element in the case: men are multiplied by the natural process of generation; but it takes two: man and woman. Don't wince: I am dealing simply with a fact. Now, if human population began with an accident, it must have been a double accident. There must have been a woman as well as a man. Do you really think it possible that blind Nature, happening to brew a man in some vapour or pond, or rocky depth, should brew a woman at the same time? Is it a conceivable hypothesis that force without mind, impulse without plan, germinating energy without purpose, should produce two instead of one, and each one different from the other, and both, between them, possessing power to re-produce their kind, a power which they did not require for themselves, and the possession of which was indicative of purpose with

regard to the future?—The difficulties are very great, I confess.

Are they not insuperable?—They look that way.

And we are to receive this incredible imagination without evidence, in order to dispense with God, whose existence is a mathematically involved necessity, and of which actual and irrefragable evidence has transpired in the history of mankind?—Well, you see, they don't now say there is no God. They say they don't know.

Well, well, well! They say they don't know, and yet they reject the evidence, because they cannot imagine Him! They cannot imagine God doing wonders, but they can imagine nothing doing wonders! Extraordinary! It comes to this, by their own confession, they don't know that there is no God. Therefore there may be, and they have no reason at all for rejecting the evidence of His existence, except an invincible intellectual prejudice, which the Bible well describes as "an evil heart of unbelief," which says to God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."

Chapter 7

MECHANISM OF THE HUMAN FRAME

You were very severe last time.—You must allow for the immense consequence of the truth involved. It has been well said that there are two subjects in which human fervour is liable to be more strongly engaged than any other—family and religion: sex and God. 'Tis true. Pardon my vehemence. The argument is strong. It is not at an end yet.

Do you mean the argument of last month?—Yes.

I should have thought you had pretty well exhausted it.—Not quite. You have not only to think of the absurdity of chance producing a human pair, essential to each other, but of producing either of them with their varied and exquisite powers. If chance were at work, its operation would necessarily work in every variety of caprice. Its results must certainly be marked as often by foolishness as wisdom. But, in fact, chance does not work in any region of Nature that man is acquainted with. Whatever happens has a cause, and that cause has

a cause, and so back and back. When a new plant or animal is discovered, no one imagines that it has come into existence spontaneously, or that there has never been the like before. The discoverer sets to work to find its history—its origin—its habitat—if he can. If this is the case with the simplest form of life, vegetable or animal, how much more in a case like man, whose organization shews such a complex adaptation of means to ends, and such an exquisite result from the whole.

Man is no more remarkable in that respect than the animals, is he?—Well, yes; his powers are higher: but even if it were not so—even if the animals are on a par with him as regards the wisdom of their organization, the argument would only be all the stronger. I select the case of man because he is the most signal illustration.

Well, what have you to say about him?—There is more to be said than I can say, but I will try and give a rough idea or two. First of all, look at him in his entirety. He is a perfectly extraordinary phenomenon. He is a working machine that not only does the work it was made for, but repairs itself as it performs its work: a self-working, self-repairing machine.

I am not sure that I catch your idea there. The working and the repairing are both one thing aren't they?—No: No doubt the repairing is a class of work, but it is not the kind of work I mean. By work, I mean the exercises and functions of intelligent life. For example, a man attends to business, or serves his friends, or engages in study, or devotes himself to politics, or travel. In all this, he uses the mechanism of his being, but it is outside and extra to that mechanism. It is what that mechanism

was designed for, speaking generally. The heart was not made to pump blood merely that blood might be pumped, but that the blood so pumped might contribute to intelligent life as a result. The lungs were not made to breathe, and the stomach to digest, merely that breath might be inhaled and food converted into new forms, but that these functions might sustain life, and admit of the objects involved in life. Now, what I wished to say was, that here you have a wonderful machine, that not only does the work it was made for, but that repairs itself at the same time as it goes along.

Repairs itself?—Yes. You know that there is continual waste going on with all that we do, and that if there were not continual renewal or repair, we should not be able to carry on a single day. Now, this renewal is going on every moment in every part of every organ of the body, and yet we don't have to stop to let it be done, but go on working and repairing at the same time. Take the eye for example: you go on using it all day, and yet with every throb of the heart its substance is being renewed, without interfering with your use of it. My contention is, that on this general view, we cannot contemplate the human organization without having reason to feel that extraordinary wisdom must have been at work to produce such an organization, and that the idea of chance doing it is an outrage upon reason.

As I said before, the argument would apply to everything: because there is just as much wisdom, as you call it, in the organization of a snail.—No doubt it is so; and as I said before, that only makes the argument all the stronger. Only it is more clearly seen, perhaps, in the case of a man, because

of his superior parts. The case is very powerful when you come to details.

Such as—?

Well, such as the eye, taking the eye again in another way. You will admit the great importance and the great delicacy of the function of eye-sight?—Certainly.

Consider, then, how the eye is placed: in a bony socket which protects it absolutely from injury or interference on all sides. Even in front, where exposure is essential for its work, it is protected by the jutting eyebrow, and the socket sides come so nearly level with the organs as to make it difficult to hurt the eye. Does not such a placing of the eye argue the highest wisdom?—That, of course, is not to be denied.

Then, consider the curtain of the eye-lid, by which, without interference with the eye-sight, the action of the eye is eased and guarded by an adjustment that works completely over it as quick as lightning—subject to the control of the will, and yet working most of the time automatically. See, too, the arrangement of tubes and vessels by which just the requisite amount of moisture is kept in constant supply, so that we are saved from the serious inconvenience that would result from the drying of so delicate a membrane. When men say that chance, or the operation of blind force has evolved such skilful combinations, we can but look in astonishment and wonder what they mean. In such talk, “chance,” and “blindness,” and “wisdom” have lost their meanings. Not only so, but such talk goes against the most elementary postulate of science, that for every phenomenon of Nature there must be an adequate cause.

You have said nothing about the eye itself.—Thank you. I was about to refer to the structure of the eye itself, as the most wonderful lesson of all. Whether we regard the result secured, or the means employed to secure the result, it is nothing less than an astounding marvel. Those are best able to appreciate the masterly result who have tried their hand at any time at the construction of optical glasses. By the due adjustment of convex or concave lenses, you can get a near or distant enlargement as you desire: but the adjustment involves much trouble, and when you have got it, it remains just what you have made it. If you want a different adjustment, you must work your ratchet backwards and forwards. Who could invent a lens that would be self-adjusting, and become convex or concave, according to the degree of light or the distance of the object to be operated on? This is the extraordinary character of the eye as an optical instrument. It involves an exquisiteness of construction, and a sensitiveness of action, that baffles the imagination. Then, we have to consider that besides an internal structure so perfectly adapted to the uses of sight, the whole apparatus is set in a gearing of muscles that enables the will to turn it into any position in a moment. We are so accustomed to the use and grace of this arrangement that we fail to be struck with it as the case warrants. There it is: a physiological miracle which we carry daily with us. How different would human expression and human deportment have been, if the eye, instead of being the flexible self-acting instrument it is, had been a mechanical fixture in the head. Lenses of unchangeable form would have unfitted the eye to see anything clearly under or over a certain fixed distance; and,

without muscles for turning the eye, we should have been compelled to turn the head with every new requirement of sight. Think of the awkward deportment: think of the expressionless countenance: think of the defectiveness of vision, and the tiresomeness of the use of the eye in that case. If the eye had been the work of chance, there was much more likelihood of such clumsiness, than of perfect skilfulness and beauty of the present arrangement. "Chance!" Away, away! It is an outrage upon reason; an insult to common sense; the denial of experience; the confounding of true science, and philosophy. Not chance, but contrivance: not blind force, but powerful wisdom: is called for as the only solution of the beautiful marvel.

Chapter 8

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EYE

It was the eye last time: what is it now?—I have not done with the eye yet. I wish I could say all that the subject admits of. I must content with amateur indications: but sometimes these are more useful than technical profundities.

I agree with you. The subject is often lost in the details, like a landscape when you apply your magnifying glass to the blades of grass. What more is there about the eye?—Well, there is the system of muscles by which we turn it about at will in the socket. These are so placed with regard to thickness and thinness, and so attached to the ball of the eye as to enable the possessor of the eye to use it to the very utmost advantage, and with the rapidity of lightning. He can turn it this way and that, up or down, to the right side or the left side, just as he wishes. Who contrived this perfect apparatus, which excels the most exquisite machine ever invented by man, as much as the sunlight exceeds

gaslight? Man did not contrive it. It could not contrive itself. It could not be there without being contrived. Give us God, and we are at rest. Take Him from us, and you must give us something more baffling: for the wise workmanship you cannot deny. But you cannot take Him from us. Only "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God."

God forbid that I should take Him from you.—Pardon me. I am speaking to the impersonal mass of unbelief. The force of the argument about the muscles of the eye becomes very great in connection with that one of them which enables us to turn the eye upwards. This differs from all the rest in a peculiar way. The others are all laid alongside the eye inside the socket, and work easily by contraction; but, on account of the jutting of the eyebrow over the eye, there is no room for the working of an ordinary muscle to give the upward motion. It is the way this difficulty has been got over that shews the participation of intelligence in the organizing of the human structure. An American professor recently explaining it to his students, said, "And here, gentlemen, I will shew you what a clever thing God Almighty has done." He called their attention to a little hole in the bone of the eyebrow (which anyone may see on inspecting a skull). He stated that the muscle for giving the upward motion, on getting to this hole, shrunk into a tendon (something of the nature of catgut), and on getting through the hole, again turned into muscle, spread out upon and attached to the eye, so that when the muscle behind contracted, it pulled this tendon through the bone-hole, like a rope through a pulley, and so produced the motion otherwise impossible. What are we to say to such a thing as that? If we were to discover

a contrivance to get round a difficulty in the clumsiest machine used by man, we should never think of attributing it to anything but the action of human intelligence. In this case, we cannot attribute it to human intelligence. What are we to attribute it to ?

(Pauses).

What have you to say ?—Well, I have a difficulty which I know not how to express.

What is it ?—There is such a difference between the products of Nature and the contrivances of man, that I find myself unable to reason from one to the other. If I find an adaptation of machinery to accomplish some human end, I know man must have designed it and worked it out, because mechanical contrivances do not adjust themselves. But, in the matters you are speaking of, I cannot help feeling there is a great difference.

Doubtless, there is a great difference, but the difference is not of a kind that affects the principle.—I am not so sure about that.

Do you think natural adaptations are self adaptations ?—There is a good deal of self adaptation in Nature. If I cut my finger, the cut parts, if placed together, instantly begin to weave themselves together again.

That is but the operation of an already existing machinery, is it not ? It is not a self-performance. It is the nature of the ruptured organism to re-unite its ruptured parts by the very law which maintains and perpetuates it from moment to moment, out of the blood. The oozing blood and the cut flesh have in them, by their properties, the power of coalescing with sundered parts. The power is already in the organism. It is possessed by the organism. It is part of it. It is not a self-evolved

power. You would have to seek its origin in the origin of the organism as a whole.—I am not quite clear about it.

You would not say that the finger, being cut, says to itself: "Now I must stop this bleeding: I must heal this wound," and goes to work, and does it by intelligent contrivance? The healing is done—not by intelligent volition, but by a law already in the finger.—No doubt, that is how it is; and it seems to me that that works against your argument.

How so? I say that an intelligent arrangement of any kind argues the action of intelligence in arranging it.—And yet the finger heals without intelligence.

But the finger itself is the product of intelligence, and its power to heal is only a part of the constitution imparted to it in the original operation of that intelligence. You must go back to the origin of the finger to discuss the matter properly. Do you say that the finger made itself?—I am by no means so lucid on these questions as I would like to be.

Surely you cannot hesitate about so simple a matter.—Of course the finger did not make itself; but it does not follow that it had a maker in the sense you are contending for.

I am not contending for any sense inconsistent with the facts of the case. I do not say the finger was made as the watchmaker makes a watch, for that is a human performance, and God's ways and methods are altogether different from man's, as He Himself says. What I do say is, that at some stage or other, Operative Wisdom must have contrived so wisely-constituted a thing as the finger.—If it grows, it would not require to be made.

Grows? What is that? Do you know what

growth is?—It looks pretty much like a self-development.

Re-consider. Is not growth but the development of an already existing organism, by the power it has of assimilating suitable materials to its own nature?—Suppose I say "Yes." You say "it has" the power. This must be a self-power.

A self-power in the sense of possession: but how was it acquired?—Ah, that is the question.

Does not that take us away to the beginning of things?—Well.

Take the case of a man, a cow, or a rose. They all grow by the assimilation of extraneous material; but is not the growth-power a helpless power, and in no sense a self-power? Will food taken by a cow grow into man nature? Will a rose turn into a cabbage? What makes a rose a rose? What makes a cow a cow? Is it not growth, for they are rose and cow from the first moment of growth? The question can only be properly considered at the starting point. What is the origin of cow nature? What is the origin of rose nature? There is not a creature upon earth, in the actual experience of things, but what has come from a previous creature of like nature.—But it is by growth.

You seem to think that weakens the argument. In my judgment it strengthens it. It is a greater feat of power and wisdom to endow seed with the power of developing the full nature of a thing in all its forms and attributes, than to make it direct in each individual case. Is there anything like it in human works? Take into your hand the seed of a rose, or a tomato, or a tree. Realise, if you can, by what process of involution the nature of the previous plants from which these seeds have come,

is condensed into that minute substance, so perfectly that, when subject to the right conditions, it will unfold a rose or other organism, as complete and identical in form, and nature, and fragrance, as the original flower, plant, or animal. The parallel in human work of any kind would be, if a man, having made a sewing machine (say), was able to so contrive it that a speck of iron from the machine could be grown into another sewing machine by simply blowing it into a red heat. That would be an invention for you. You would say such an inventor must be a superhumanly clever inventor. Yet, because God shews this wise power, you think it is no wise power at all, but—what?

Chapter 9

THE SEED OF PLANT AND ANIMAL

WELL, what have you to say to the contrivance that concentrates in a seed the power from which the future plant or animal will spring? — It is very wonderful.

Can you account for it apart from the operation of intelligence?—My difficulty would be to account for it on any principle.

It would not be so difficult to understand on the assumption of creative intelligence, would it?—I don't know about that.

If there were no intelligence, there would be no accounting for it at all, would there?—Of course, I grant that the supposition of creative intelligence would simplify the problem, but I find it exceedingly difficult to apply the idea of an extraneous operative intelligence to such a work, with the conception we have formed of intelligence. We have derived that conception of intelligence from our own experience as human beings, which is necessarily a totally different thing

from the kind of operations we are invited to recognize in Nature. Man is ignorant of everything apart from experience; in a sense he is outside of everything. His constructive or inventive achievements are the result of experimenting upon the things and conditions around him, and of his need for the things he constructs. It is not possible to apply such an idea to the operations of the Power of the universe. Everything is in this Power, and He must know all conditions and possibilities. He needs not, like man, to make and adapt to get over a difficulty. Therefore, I cannot reason from one to the other.

Well, no, you cannot. No man can. I am not asking you to do so. Your remark draws reasonable distinctions; but if you think it out thoroughly enough, you will find that it relates to *modes* of operation, and not to the *fact* of operation. It is upon the *fact* of operation that I wish to fix your attention. I grant there is no parallel between the works of man and the works of God; but there *are* the two classes of works, are there not?—That is the question.

There are works of man?—Yes, there are works of man.

And there are works that are not of man?—Are you right in calling them works?

Call them what you like: they are facts, operations, things done.—I wish to fence off assumption.

Well, it is not an assumption that the seed of plant and animal contains the potentiality (as scientists say) of the future plant and animal. Consider what a complexity of concentrated power this almost always means. Consider the light and airy fabric of a bird for example—its bones light and hollow for easy carriage in the atmosphere; its wing feathers formed with

mathematical exactness, of various sizes and curves, to give the right blows on the air for flying, and having just the right muscles to supply the needed action. Think of all this, automatically organized or built up in an egg, which to the human eye presents nothing but a mass of albumen. Here is a work—a thing done. It is not done by man. It is not done by itself. Each nature comes from its own seed only. You never find sea-gulls come from the eggs of the sparrow, or any creature come without derivation. If the work were self-done, everything would spring up everywhere. No seed would be necessary for anything; whereas you know the seed or propagation in some other way is essential. If the individuals and the seed of any species perish, the species becomes extinct. Consequently, I am justified in asking you to admit that the implantation of seed-power must have been an operation performed in the beginning.—What beginning?

The beginning of the creatures.—If they had a beginning!

Ho, ho! you are not going to say the creatures are eternal, are you?—Well, no.

You recognize the doctrine of science, I presume; that there was a time in the history of the earth when there were no living creatures upon it?—Yes, but that is inconceivable ages back.

It matters not how far back. When you get there, there were no creatures, and then you had the beginning I spoke of—the introduction of creatures, with this wonderful capacity, bearing the stamp of supremest wisdom, and requiring the utmost power to perform.—The whole process of reproduction is so automatic, as you expressed it, that I cannot clearly deduce your conclusion from it.

My friend, was the start automatic?—I am not clear about the start.

There must have been a start. There must have been a first animal, a first fish, a first blade of grass. You would not say there was such a departure from Nature then that they came into being spontaneously. That would be a greater miracle than creation. If not spontaneously, it must have been from an Operative Cause, and as that operative cause could not have been a powerless animal, fish, or blade of grass, we are bound to ask what it was, and to demand that it was equal to the production of such wonderful organisms.—Organisms without intelligence produce them now: why not assume they were produced in some such way then?

Because the way is barred. There were none such to produce them. That is the argument. The power of unintelligent organisms to produce them now is only part of the mechanism which it required Wisdom and Power to set a-going in the first case. You heard of Edison's phonograph. A man speaks into this instrument, and his voice causes indentations, which, when afterwards passed over a vibrator, give back the sounds that produced them in the first instance, and therefore speak back the words spoken, even after the original speaker may be long dead. Now, suppose the words spoken back by the phonograph were distinct enough to make the needful indentations on another instrument, and that again on another, you would have an instrument that could be mechanically multiplied with speaking power. What would you say to the man who, in after generations, should say that because a phonograph of Mr. Gladstone's speech could multiply phonograph *ad lib.* therefore it was not necessary that there should have

been an original speech of Mr. Gladstone's to start the thing? This is virtually the position of those who say that, because they see the most exquisite contrivances of intelligence propagated from age to age on mechanical principles, therefore no intelligence was needed to start the process in the beginning.—There is some force in your illustration. I will consider it. I am anxious to believe, and shall only be too glad if you can take my judgment captive.

Chapter 10

HUMAN INTELLIGENCE ITSELF A PROOF OF GOD

It seems to me that the very putting of the question is proof of the existence of that which is questioned. —How do you make that out? It strikes me as a very extraordinary suggestion.

Well, the question indicates considerable astuteness on the part of the questioner. Here is a looking, thinking, prying creature called man, quick-glancing east, west, north, and south: noting this, noting that, putting this and that together: observing, reflecting, arguing, making experiments, studying, reasoning: constructing instruments, digging, boring, melting dissolving: weighing, calculating, sailing on the sea, running over the land, exploring not only unknown parts of the earth which he inhabits, but the vast regions of space which he cannot ascend, scouring the heavens with his telescope and mapping it out into sections and provinces. If this audacious restless, prying creature had always been on the earth, we might have supposed him the root and source, in some inexplicable way, of the wonderful

intellectual power he exhibits; but as we consider him, we note that he had no existence a short way back, and that in each individual case, he shortly lies down and dies. The question, therefore, propounds itself in loud imperative tones, Where got man this wonderful faculty? Must it not have existed before him—independently of him? Was there no wisdom before *he* was born? Is it possible that *he* is the highest intelligence in the universe? Is it conceivable that there was no contriving power anywhere till *he* himself wisely contrived to put in an appearance, seeing all things small and great in heaven and earth are wisely made? If man has a little wisdom where did he get his wisdom from? He is wisely constructed: must not the power that constructed him be wiser than he? “He that hath formed the eye, shall He not see? He that hath formed the ear, shall He not hear.” The propounding of the question, “Is there a God?” proves the existence of a power equal to the production of the intelligence that puts the question, and necessitates that that power shall be as much superior to that intelligence as all cause must be superior to all effects. Man’s intelligence is a mere effect: where is the cause?—That is the question. Scientific men seem to find it in the molecular combination of atoms?

But who or what combined the atoms? Granting the existence of atoms, they could not combine themselves. If there were nothing but atoms they must have remained atoms, and filled the universe with eternal dust. Instead of that, it is a universe of order and glory and beauty; and it is all in one system—under one control, as shown by the co-relation of the stars. Where is the seat of this control?—Ah, who can tell?

There must be such, must there not? If there were not, things would get into a whirl and a chaos. They do not. They are held together, and held apart, as with an iron rein.—I should say that is the law of things.

What do you mean by that?—Well, the quality or tendency of things in general to keep in a certain relation. Fire burns; water finds its level; gravitation shapes the course of planets. It is the nature of things. I do not see that we require to go outside of things themselves for an explanation of their behaviour.

No doubt the law of their behaviour is in them (or rather, let us say, they in it): but that does not account for their being there to behave. How came they to be there at all, and to have that law? They must have had a cause equal to their production in the first instance.—That is not to be denied.

Must not that cause have combined power and wisdom? Without power, without wisdom, how could it have been equal to the production of works of power and wisdom?—As a matter of terms, I cannot evade your argument. Yet I have a feeling as if it were not conclusive.

A feeling is not a safe steersman in such a matter.—Though I say feeling, of course I mean a reservation of reason.

Can you define it?—It is a little difficult.

Try.—Well, I have a difficulty in reconciling what I might call the mechanical relations of everything we see in the universe with the intelligent initiative and superintendence usually associated with the idea of God. Everything is interlocked in an endless chain of mechanical causes. The sun shines, the rain forms, the winds blow: vegetation springs:

animals are born, and feed, and propagate, and die. The stars move in their courses by mutual influence and attraction; and there is nothing occurs anywhere, so far as we can see, but what springs naturally from some antecedent cause on mechanical principles.

Therefore, what?—Therefore, the intelligent causation of everything that you argue for is not so obvious to me.

Perhaps you may not have apprehended my argument quite clearly?—Perhaps.

I am not contending for a moment-to-moment operation of Divine intelligence in detail. If I cut my finger, it does not require a Divine volition to make the blood flow. If a man gets no food, I do not say it requires a Divine volition to make him die. If a dry thicket catch fire on a hot summer day, I do not say it requires the action of Divine intelligence and power to cause the conflagration that follows. So in larger matters: the moon's motion round the earth; the earth's motion round the sun; the movements of the whole stellar universe are the result of the relations things sustain to one another.—Then you seem to me to shut out God.

By no means. Taking His existence as proved by "the things that are made" (to use Paul's expression), and especially by the revelation of Himself He has made during the course of the world's history, we have to realize that the universal fabric of things is put together in a way to give Him the least trouble of management as we might express it. His works are "in Him," as the Scriptures declare, but He is separate from His works. That is, He holds them all in the effluence of His eternal energy which the Bible denominates Spirit, but is Himself a distinct and separable entity, whose nucleus, as we might

express it, is in eternal Light, yet whose presence is as co-extensive with the Spirit as the sun is co-extensive with its light. Out of His omnipotent and eternal energy He has, by will and wisdom, concreated the tangible system of things which we call the universe. But He has so made this universe that, while in Him and subject to His power, it works by automatic action. This action which He started is what we call *Nature*. His interference at any time when called for is what we call *Miracle*.—There are some strange things in your remarks. It is a new idea to me about God saving Himself trouble. I always understood He was omnipotent and infinite, and did not require to save Himself trouble.

You are thinking of the popular traditions on those subjects. We must take the Bible and Nature. They do not contradict each other. The one is but a supplement to the other. The modern demonstration of the conservation of energy proves that everything that is done involves the expenditure of energy, and that energy is measurable. It follows that when God works, He can spend much or little, as the case may require. When little does He does not spend much. He has spent much energy in the creation of heaven and earth; but the result of His work is a self-working machine (self-working as a steam engine is self-working when set a-going), which leaves Him little to do beyond the pleasure of superintendence in the evolution of His purpose.—It is an extraordinary view, I must say.

It is an inevitable view, when the various elements of truth in the case are combined. You cannot dispense with God as the explanation of things: but neither can you dispense with the automatic operation of Nature in its ordinary bearings. Therefore we

must put the two together—with this grand result, that with the most exact study of Nature's laws, we can combine the recognition and worship of God, and the exhilarating hope of that future glory which He has promised: the prospect of which supplies an interest and a principle to present mortal life otherwise entirely lacking.

Chapter 11

THE SELF-ACTION OF THE UNIVERSE

You surprised me last month by your suggestion about God saving Himself trouble.—You need not be surprised. The conclusion will force itself on you on reflection. The universe has, self-evidently, been constructed by Eternal power and wisdom; but, as self-evidently, it has had imparted to it a certain power of self-action that relieves Eternal power from the necessity of perpetual volition in the evolution of details.

That is what is not at first sight quite evident.—Why, my friend, it is the thing that is most of all evident, and the thing that, perhaps, has more to do with suggesting to the superficial mind that there is no God than anything else.

How so?—Take the familiar instance of grain. So long as the farmer holds it in sacks, it is simply grain; but let him sow it in his field, it sprouts and brings a new crop. Here is an automatic action and not a Divine volition. The constitution of the

grain has been so adjusted to the chemical action of soil and moisture that the subjection of the grain to the soil and moisture is all that is necessary to produce fructification. The Divine volition has not to intervene to produce the result. The Divine volition has already established the conditions that lead to the result, and these conditions are so automatic in their action that they only require to be brought into relation, one with another, for the result to ensue—like a ball rolling down a hill when brought to the edge, or gunpowder going off with an explosion when fire is brought near. It is because of this that man can control the works of God to the extent to which he can manipulate the conditions, but this extent is very limited, and always subject to permission.

Your argument seems to exclude God.—By no means. He cannot be excluded. He is necessitated as the Contriver of the conditions in the first instance, as we have seen; for the things did not make themselves. And He is required when anything extra has to be done: as when Aaron's rod has to bud and yield almonds in one night, that the Divine foundations of the Aaronic priesthood may be demonstrated; or, as when a multitude has to be fed with loaves that did not come out of the field. These things could not happen without an express volition of Omnipotence. But we cannot shut our eyes to the evident truth that creation has a passive aspect in which the power of God is not operative in the direct volitional sense. Creation is the power of God incorporate: but as an incorporation of that power, it has automatic properties with which He has invested it in the process of incorporation. All these properties are subject to His control. He has not

made a machine than can ever get beyond His management. At the same time, it is a machine to which He has imparted a self-action within certain limits.

If there is a self-action, what need for God?—My friend, self-action is a different thing from self-manufacture. You may make a self-acting machine: but a self-acting machine could not make itself. A railway train in motion is a self-acting machine for the time being: what should you think of a man who should say, What need for a maker?

Perhaps I ought to have put the question the other way: If there is God, what room is there for self-action?—There is just the room that God has provided. We must recognize facts. Here is a fire-place, and there is firewood and coal. If I leave them where they are, they remain as they are; but if I put the firewood in the grate, and the coals on the wood, and apply a light, there is fire that consumes both wood and coal and gives out heat. You would not say that that consumption and that heat are due to the direct action of a Divine volition. They are due to conditions established by Divine volition; but the action of those conditions is not itself a Divine volition. In fact, here lies the difference between God and His works: "miracle," as we call it, and Nature. Nature, at first, is a miracle, in being the product of Divine volition. Afterwards, we call its self-acting powers natural. And this is a real distinction, the omission to recognize which, is the cause of much of the confusion of thought that reigns among students of Nature on the subject of God.

I must, of course, admit the cogency of your remarks. It was your description of it as a saving of trouble that grated on my understanding. And I cannot now say that you have reconciled me to it.

It must take as much "trouble," as you call it, to uphold a self-acting system in being, as to perform all its operations in detail.—I do not insist on the term. There may be a better description of the doings of Him "who fainteth not, neither is weary;" "who slumbers not, nor sleeps." At the same time, there is a tangible truth in the matter that supplies an important link in the harmonization of the truth of God's existence with the operations of Nature. "A sparrow cannot fall" without His knowledge and permission: but He is not the direct Author of the fall of the thousands of sparrows that are killed by the cruel or the hungry. "All things are naked and open to Him, neither is any creature that is not manifest in His sight." Yet their actions are subject to their own unconstrained volitions. "None can hide himself" from the Divine perception, . . none can elude the Divine power. Heaven and earth are embraced in His universal presence, as the Scriptures so sublimely declare. Yet it remains as yet only as a matter of prayer that His will may be done on earth as it is done in heaven. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being," and yet we stand related to an inflexible rule of mechanical law that will kill us if we do not conform: by drowning if we submerge ourselves in water; by burning if we go into fire; by starvation if we neglect to eat and drink.

It is a subject that requires much thinking about.—But which will repay the process.

Perhaps.

Chapter 12

THE FOOL'S OPINION

"THE fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." You are acquainted with this utterance of David's on the subject?—Yes; I should think everyone must have heard of it.

What do you think of it?—It would be very disrespectful to David were I to suggest there is any weakness in it.

Do you think there is?—It has never seemed so strong to me as it has to some people.

Where is the lack of strength?—It begs the question: it is a dogmatic assertion, and I never find anything satisfactory in mere assertion.

It depends upon the assertor, doesn't it? If your father or friend asserts that he has made up his mind to settle a handsome income on you forthwith, you would not think the assertion unsatisfactory?—That is a different thing.

Not if David had as much personal knowledge of the matter he asserts as your father or friend might

have as to his own ability or intention.—Ah, but you see, he had not, and could not have.

Don't be so sure about that.—Where is the room for doubt?

In the things alleged concerning David. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day and forward," that is, from his youth upwards. If the Spirit of the Lord was upon David, he would have knowledge of the things of the Spirit. Accordingly, we read concerning the Divine temple built by Solomon, that it was built to a pattern or plan that "David had by the Spirit." "All this," said David, "the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me" (1 Sam. xvi. 13; 1 Chron. xxviii. 12-19). At the close of his days, he said, "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Sam. xxiii. 2). Now, suppose this was true, David would have the same personal knowledge of God that he would have of the earth or sky, would he not?—I don't know that.

Why, certainly. "The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God. Now we have received the Spirit," says Paul, ". . . that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. ii. 12, 10). If David had the Spirit of God abiding with him from the day of his anointing to the day of his death, the verities of Divine existence must have been as obvious to his consciousness as anything is to any of us.

But how do we know that David had the Spirit of God?—The Bible asserts it, as I have read.

Yes, but a loose historical statement like that, does

not amount to much.—Peter says, “David was a prophet” (Acts ii. 29, 30), and that “The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets” (1 Peter i. 10, 11).

Yes, that is Peter.—Jesus says David spoke “in Spirit” (Matt. xxii. 43). You see it does not rest on what you call “a loose historical statement.” You will have to reject the New Testament: you will have to part company with Christ and Peter before you can get rid of the evidence that the Spirit of God was a presence with David. Are you prepared to say that all these were a work of error and imposture?

You press me hard.—Legitimately. The question justifies it, and the state of facts surrounding it. If David was the subject of a Divine illumination, which made him in actual touch with God, I submit that there is something very weighty in his declaration that “the fool hath said in his heart there is no God.” He was speaking with personal knowledge and, therefore, with all the assurance that you would feel in rebutting the assumptions of ignorant people who might call in question the wonderful applications of science in our day.

I see where you are. There is something in it put in that way.—Besides, David does not rest his dictum on his mere authority. There is an implication in a direction of evidence in his use of the term “fool.” He seems to say that a man, with all the facts before him that any man has, must be a fool who says or thinks “There is no God.” This is, in fact, his very argument in one of the Psalms. “Be not,” says he, “as the horse or the mule, which have no understanding.” “Understand ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that hath planted the ear, shall He not

hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" (Psa. xciv. 8, 9). This is the argument that Paul uses in another shape: "That which may be known of God is manifest . . . for the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, *being understood by the things that are made*, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that *they are without excuse*" (Rom. i. 19, 20). This is in fact, the argument I have been pressing upon your attention for some time past.

I have to thank you for your pertinacity. — The matter is of the very utmost moment. Let me put it again. It is really based upon a scientific maxim. Science lays it down that, in the realm of physical nature, it is not possible that anything can occur without an adequate cause. If this is true (and its truth cannot be questioned), consider how God is forced upon us (under whatever name you please), by the spectacle of the mighty universe so replete with works of wisdom and power. Must it not have had a Cause equal to its production? Is not David's proposition scientifically unassailable, that the man who says there is no such Cause is a fool?

Chapter 13

THE GREAT UNIVERSE AND SMALL MAN

WHAT have you to say to the argument of last month, that the wisdom-marked and power-shewing universe must have a cause in which power and wisdom are rooted?—I must seem dull, but I cannot jump with you so quickly. It is easy to talk of the universe. I find it difficult to grasp the greatness of the subject. The more I think of it, the more I am lost.

But the thing is there to be noticed and thought about.—Yes, the universe is there; but I find the thinking hard. It is so great—so inconceivably stupendous—I am staggered, paralysed, crushed.

The sensation is natural to small mentalities like ours, but our inability to grasp the greatness can make no difference to the conclusion arising from a contemplation of it.—I do not quite follow you there.

My argument is not affected by the size of the thing. If the universe were small, the argument would be the same. Evidence of wisdom and power

would shew the existence of wisdom and power whether the thing shewing it were large or small. If the thing is large, the argument is all the stronger. —I suppose it must be so; but I feel a sort of intellectual paralysis in the presence of the measureless immensity spread out before us in the heavens.

The paralysis will be respected by every one entering into the greatness of the subject. At the same time, it is a feeling to be resisted. It is due to the weakness and smallness of man, and also in some degree perhaps to an unconfessed latent egoism, which sets itself up as the standard by which things are to be measured and determined. We must get rid of it, otherwise we shall become petrified and reduced to a state of almost intellectual idiotcy. The universe is there whether we peer into it, or leave it alone in our frightened impotence. The power and wisdom which it displays are glorious facts whether we joyfully recognize them or lie down in mental stupefaction like the blinking brute. The inference they yield is an inherent indication in the nature of things, whether we discern it or give way to our indisposition to follow it. It is evident we have to choose between following reason or lying down in intellectual sloth. I advise you to shake yourself together, rub your eyes, get rid of this fog, and follow the glorious Light.—Your advice is good. I hope I am not disposed to intellectual sloth. My difficulty is rather to reconcile the various indications of reason. Some seem to point one way and some another.

Vigorously seize and combine them. They must be in harmony. There cannot be such a thing as actual contradiction in the constitution of the universe. If there appears to be so in any case, the appearance

must be due to incorrect sight in us—not to the things themselves.—Very likely very true, but we feel the difficulty all the same.

Come to the point: What difficulty in conceding the pre-existence of power and wisdom capable of producing the works of power and wisdom which we see in the universe?—There must, of course, have existed the power of production before the production took place.

Very well; put your foot down there; there you have solid ground to stand on as a base for the next move.—What would you call the next move?

The recognition of God.—Ah, that is easy to say.

What difficulty in the doing?—Well, my understanding is at fault. I do not know what I am admitting in admitting the pre-existence of power of production. I do not understand what this is.

You need not try. You cannot understand it: but you must recognize the fact, even if you cannot understand it.—I have a difficulty in admitting a fact which I do not understand.

Nay, my friend; not if its truth as a fact is undoubted. You admit many facts you do not understand.—I think not.

What have you to say to your own power of thought, and your power to will and to act out your will: do you understand it? Do you know what thought is, and how it is formed in the brain? Do you know what life is, whether in plant or animal? Do you know what gravitation is, that draws globe to globe in boundless space? Do you know what electricity is that flashes your signals across the ocean in a moment or gives a dazzling light in the dark? My friend, there are a thousand things that you know as facts, that you cannot under-

stand in the nature of them, and yet whose truth as facts, you never for a moment allow this lack of understanding to interfere with. Is it not so?—I must allow there is force in what you say.

Why should you allow your inability to understand to interfere with the frank and cordial recognition of the most glorious of all facts—that the universe which we behold, in which we live, of which we form a part, is the product of eternal power and wisdom in which it subsists from moment to moment?—I don't know that I can answer you. I suppose it is a little want of intellectual perspicacity on my part. The wheels of my intellectual machinery seem a little clogged. I would like to understand God.

My friend, you cannot; and you will never have peace or settled faith until you recognize that you cannot. It is enough that you believe that He is. This you are compelled to do. You cannot logically escape it. The scientific minds of the age do not escape it. They accept the conclusion in other terms. They admit "the Unknowable" and speak of "force" and recognize reason as the guide of its evolutions. They do not profess to understand the Unknowable. The very term is a confession of their inability to understand. Yet *they* do not reject because they cannot understand. *They* simply say there is truth beyond them. *They acknowledge* it is there though admitting incapacity to know what it is. why should *your* inability to understand God be the least reason for not accepting Him, since your reason perceives He must be?—As I have said it is probably the result of dulness. Yet I can see a point when it is established. I admit the general cogency of your argument; but there are still some difficulties—not exactly obstacles—which I may submit next time we meet.

Chapter 14

LIMITED KNOWLEDGE

My dear and burdened friend, I hope your difficulties are finding their level.—I am partly ashamed of my difficulties, I confess.

There is no particular cause for shame. The sense of difficulty indicates a certain amount of discernment. There are some people that it would be quite refreshing to see distressed with a difficulty. At the same time, the presence of difficulty means more or less the obstruction of light.—That is what makes me ashamed.

Doubtless, the free course of light would banish all darknesses. Yet the shadows shew that light is near.—Also that it is obstructed. That is what I lament.

The sorrow is a noble one, but you may let it go too far. Our difficulties are due to our impotencies, and our impotencies are realities for the time being, to be taken into account. We are not capable of knowing everything at present. It is well to know

and note the fact. It mitigates our distress in dealing with such subjects to recognize distinctly that we can only go so far. If a man thought he ought to be able to go up to the moon, his actual inability to do so would be a distress unknown to the man who recognizes that it is impossible.

You would almost seem to argue in favour of ignorance and uncertainty.—Yes, beyond a certain point.

What!—Certainly. There are things we cannot know: things we cannot be certain about. My great contention is that we ought not to allow our ignorance of what we cannot know to interfere with our certainty as to the things we can and do know. Suppose a farmer ignorant of the causes of the seasons were to shut his eyes to the fact that there are seasons, and so refrain from sowing his fields, he would illustrate the folly of the men, who because they cannot understand God, refuse the Bread of Everlasting Life that has come to their very doors in the Bible.

The cases are not exactly parallel. The farmer would of course not be guilty of such folly, because he knows the harvest will come independently of his understanding of the matter; but is it so in this other matter?—I submit it is even so. We know enough to justify faith and hope and practical compliance, notwithstanding our inability to know everything. We cannot measure the universe, but we know enough of it to see that it must have had its origin in Power and Wisdom Eternal. Science recognizes this in other terms; for what else does "force" mean?

That is where I do not follow you. Science does not recognize a personal God.—Science does not exclude a personal God. It em-

employs a term that merely covers ignorance—I mean ignorance in the literal and confessed sense. It says, “We do not know. We know this much, that there is force or energy behind all the phenomena of Nature: what this force is we cannot tell.” So far as the knowledge possessed by science is concerned, this eternal force may be eternal God—the personal God of revelation.

“May be” is very unsatisfactory.—Nay, not in this special connection. Consider how different the case would be if we were obliged to say “cannot be.” The “may be” leaves the door open. It amounts to this, that science must be left out of the question. We must look to the general drift of facts in coming to a decision.

I think that is where I am most liable to drift. I do not see any evidence of superintendence in the universe. Everything works by such relentless law that superintendence seems excluded.—Excuse me, “relentless law” would necessarily be the basis of a rational universe on any principle. Things must work upon a stable basis of cause and effect for reason to reign and superintendence to work. Suppose fire sometimes burnt and sometimes supplied cooling moisture: suppose the ground was sometimes liquid and sometimes solid: suppose the air sometimes destroyed life and at other times sustained it: suppose the sun sometimes rose and at other times for weeks stayed away: suppose the earth sometimes extended itself vapourously into universal space, and sometimes condensed itself; how impossible for created beings to adapt themselves to such a universe of uncertainties. It is one of the necessities of the case that “relentless law” should be at the bottom of things. There could not otherwise

arise the idea of superintendence. It is well said that "order is Heaven's first law." We may rejoice that the universe is established on the immovable foundation of "relentless law."

I can join in that thought. The "relentless law" I see; but where is the superintendence?—That is a question of history purely; we have record of the superintendence.

I do not think it is a question of history. It is more an affair of experience. Do we experience the superintendence? Do we see it take place?—I should say "Yes," if you make the "we" large enough.

What do you mean? — Well, don't confine the "we" to you and me or our generation.

Why not? If it is a matter of experience, we should see it take place as well as others.—Yes, when it does take place. Superintendence is a casual thing. It happens when it happens. It is not always happening, for if it were, it would cease to be what we understand by superintendence and would be part of the system of things—the system you have called "relentless law."

You mean it is only occasionally performed?—Yes; and that those who are there to see, see. Divine superintendence is necessarily an affair of such importance as to be rare in its occurrence, and impossible in its discernment unless God permit. Those who are not contemporaneous with such a stupendous event, and to whom God does not vouchsafe privy in the matter, necessarily cannot know it.

You are too vague; come to particulars.—Well, take the opening of the Red Sea or the dividing of the Jordan: these were cases of superintendence. The "relentless law" which makes water find its level

was superintended. It was not set aside. It was regulated. Another application of "force" was brought to bear, diverting the water from a particular spot. Now, only those who were living at the time could witness the occurrence, and those only of the living who stood related to it. Their knowledge of the matter could only come to us as a matter of history.

There you are touching the question of miracle and revelation.—So men talk in their artificial discriminations; miracle and revelation are as much a department of experience as the daily phenomena of Nature.

Not for us.—Yes, for us, as an affair of testimony.

Belief on testimony is not experience.—We cannot experience everything. Some things—many things—we have to take on the experience of others; and their experience can only come to us in the form of testimony, and when lodged in the mind, it is as much an item of knowledge as experience. Take the existence of the Lake Victoria Nyanza in Central Africa: you have never seen it: probably never will. But you have no doubt of its existence, have you?

No, I cannot say that I have.—Yet you never experienced it?

I have experienced the credible testimony of it.—So have we experienced the credible testimony of the superintendence of the universe in many palpable particulars. "Relentless law" does not exclude it, but provides the platform for it, and creates the necessity for it. The universe as a mere machine that could not be superintended would be vastly less interesting than a system under omnipotent control.

Chapter 15

OMNIPOTENT CONTROL

Well, where are we now?—I wish I exactly knew.

We ought to be nearing the haven of conviction.—We are drawing near somewhere, I think, from the lights I begin to see glimmering in the dark.

The universe subject to omnipotent control was our last thought; the proposition was that it is more interesting in that respect than as the domain of blind mechanical law, acting without mind, without discernment, without plan or intelligence of any kind.—I admit that the universe subject to omnipotent control is, as you said last time, a vastly more interesting theme of contemplation than when it is looked at as a mere machine of relentless law; but to admit this is one thing, and to concede the existence of the omnipotent control is another.

No doubt they are two things, but the one is a step to the other. A reasonable assumption points in the direction of a probable truth. The existence of the omnipotent control is a reasonable assumption.

How would you establish that proposition?—Well, the unity of the system of the universe would indicate it. It is bound together as one system. No one part of it is disconnected from another—still less at war with another. The nature of the connection is inscrutable to our limited intellects; but the fact of the connection is self-evident.

I don't know that I quite follow you there.—Well, we do not know much of the measureless vastitudes of being opened out to the eye in the spectacle of the milky way, which turns out, under improved telescopes, to be countless multitudes of worlds at distances baffling the imagination; but what we do know enables us to be positive that they are as much in the grasp of a universal system of law as the more limited bodies of our own solar system. Now what is this "grasp?"

That is the question.—It cannot be gravitation, which is the mere attraction of one body for another: for such a law acting by itself would lead at last to the huddling of all worlds into one—the greatest attractions gradually overpowering the lesser. The mere actions of such a law would not have admitted of the poising of lighter bodies in independent orbits in space, like our own moon, or the smaller moons of Mars, still less the 240 asteroids which revolve in an unbroken band around the sun, between the Earth and Jupiter. They must have been drawn into the larger bodies long ago.

They are in the grasp of gravitation.

There gravitation would not be grasp at all, but the separate and disconnected tendency of bodies to run into each other according to size. Instead of gravitation being master, behold the universe extended and sub-divided into the infinite realms of

space, in the utmost order and beauty. You have the solar system made up of a number of independent members, revolving round the sun, and smaller than the sun, but they do not run into the sun. Why not? There must be a counter force. What is it? It cannot be the influence of other systems, for the other systems are too immensely remote to exercise any influence whatever, in the ratio of dynamic action shewn by the influence of one body on another in the solar system. Besides, if the neighbouring systems were strong enough to hold the planets back by mere attraction from running into the sun, they would be strong enough to prevent them from revolving round the sun. And if they were so strong as that, they would be strong enough to draw the planets away from the sun altogether in process of time: and then it would be a tug of war between the systems and the sun itself, and in the end we should see a universal straining and huddling together everywhere, like what we see among the minute bubbles on the surface of a wash-tub when left to settle. Instead of that, the universe is calmly spread out everywhere with immovable stability, in bodies large and small, according to a system of order and beauty, such as evokes the highest admiration of intelligence, and the most staggering fact of all is that this order is maintained among bodies that are loose, that float without resistance in the free realms of space.—The facts are beautiful, I must allow.

My argument is that as the whole universe is bound together in one system before our eyes, the existence of Omnipotent Control is forced upon our recognition as an assumption necessitated by the spectacle. There is no other method of accounting

for the movements of heaven and earth. It would not be going too far to say that it is a self-evident conclusion: a conclusion we cannot resist: a fact staring at us from the heavens, as we might say. There it is: control is exercised: the stupendous fabric of creation holds together from age to age, and works with greater exactness and smoothness than the most well-oiled machinery that man ever constructed. Here is a work of supreme wisdom: is it possible it could be done without intelligence? —It is done intelligently.

Could it be done intelligently without the action of intelligence? If there were no such thing as intelligence in the universe, we might understand the indisposition to recognize intelligence in works that bear the stamp of it; but here is man, himself a feeble creature on the surface of the earth, shewing such marvellous intelligence. Is it possible that his intelligence is the highest there is?—I must admit the improbability of the supposition when put in that way.

Put it in another way: Human intelligence is the attribute of the stuff of which man is made. Is he the only stuff that can evolve intelligence? Is it not in the highest degree reasonable to suppose that the attenuated stuff in which the universe subsists—called “ether” by scientists and “spirit” by the Bible—should have the capacity (say) of a higher development of intelligence than anything possible to the organization of dust?—That is a new thought to me.

I am not advancing it as a formal thesis, but as an appeal on the lowest ground against the insensate opposition of modern thought to the idea of God, and a plea for this supreme conclusion of common-

sense, that the Cause of the existence and form of the universe is the pre-existence of a Supreme Eternal Power or Being, whose attributes are necessarily those of wisdom and power and personality in the highest degree. The Bible reveals such a being, and nothing in true reason can be urged against the revelation.—As I have said before, I truly and sincerely desire to surrender to the conclusion for which you are contending; but a full surrender cannot take place in the face of anything that seems to forbid it. Some things which I have felt to be obstacles, you have disposed of. There are one or two others of a more practical and sublunary character than those we have been talking of. I may submit them should we have further opportunity.

Chapter 16

THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL

You were to state some further difficulties of a practical character. I presume they are the old objections that have been answered a thousand times.—I am not sure about that. I do not suppose they are new. Very likely they have occurred to many others before me. But I have never seen them stated or answered anywhere.

What might they be like?—Well, to come to the point at once, the spectacle of human misery of such vast extent, in every country, lasting continuously from age to age, afflicts me exceedingly; and I find a difficulty in reconciling it with the idea that there is a superintending Infinite Power. I read that a sparrow cannot fall without the Father, and that the very hairs of the head are numbered: yet I see millions of sparrows perish and multitudes of heads with the brains battered out of them in African forays and on the field of battle, without anyone taking any heed. In the great towns of civilized life,

I am appalled at the chronic mass of simmering human misery with no one to interfere and without the least token of that superintendence which you are advocating and which I should like to believe. Human life seems everywhere what Carlyle calls "a weltering chaos." There does not appear to be any superintendence or any plan. I confess I am frequently overwhelmed. A "horror of great darkness" often settles on me. If you can relieve me, you will confer a boon unutterable.—I sympathize with your distress: the burden thereof is heavy. I have often felt it myself. But there is release.

That is what I desire.—I have observed that the burden has been heaviest when I have been weakest: when the light of knowledge has been least available. There is a clue here. It points to the root of the disease. It is said that the discovery of a disease is the first step towards a remedy.

How do you diagnose the disease in this case?—I find the trouble lies in looking at the subject as a man—in contemplating it from the point of view of human feeling.

How else can we look at it or contemplate it?—If there is a God, there is another point of view.

But of what use can that point of view be to a man?—Of great use in judging of a Divine problem; because that is the aspect in which you are introducing it. You say you cannot reconcile the situation with the idea of a Divine superintendence.

Yes, or in other words, I cannot understand how such a state of things could be permitted if there is a God.—Very well, in considering that problem, you must not judge exclusively from the way the situation strikes you as a human being: you must also take into account how the thing may be from

a Divine point of view, seeing there are so many reasons for admitting (putting it mildly) the possible existence of that point of view.

But how can I judge the matter from a Divine point of view?—By considering how the thing must be from that point of view if it exists; and, in this connection, by considering what the Bible alleges concerning that point of view.

Is it possible to do so?—In a measure.

How would you shew it?—Well, take the Bible representation: "We are the clay: Thou our Potter." Supposing pottery could feel, would it be capable of judging of man's procedure towards it? Would it be justified in estimating that procedure in the light of its own feelings? Would not man's point of view be the decisive point of view in the settlement of any question arising about pottery?

But you see pottery cannot feel.—No, but the relation of things between God and man is the same. Man is a mere form of substance belonging to God. He is but of yesterday. Time back, his race did not exist upon the earth. It cannot be that his point of view is the determining point of view in the decision of problems connected with the state of his race. It must be that God's point of view is the determining point of view.

How do you bring that to bear?—Well, I say first, we must take Him in His ways as they actually are, and not as we may feel they ought to be. One of His actual ways is the presence and prevalence of the very evil you lament. Our part is to accept the fact and His explanation of the fact, and not to set up our own impressions against it.

Unfortunately, the fact we are obliged to accept. We cannot alter it. But as for the explanation, it

is beyond me.—It need not be: it is simple enough.

You mean the entrance of sin?—Yes, and all that is involved in that.

As an explanation, that, to me, is utterly inadequate. I cannot see that the greatness, power and goodness of God are consistent with the infliction of evil, age after age, on the helpless race of man, for any amount of disobedience of which he might be guilty. Nor do I think justice could find an easy place in such a conception. What have we to do with Adam's sin?—My friend, you now abandon reason and put forward feeling. You tell me you cannot see this: you cannot feel that. What argument is there in that? It may argue want of eyes or want of sensibility. It cannot prove the things are not there to be seen and felt.

You are severe.—Nay, only logical. What argument of reason can you urge against death and evil being made the concomitants of sin? Is not God great?

God is great, but I should incline to think that would be a reason against your conclusion—not in favour of it. His greatness is so great that it must matter nothing to Him whether man obeys Him or not.—In a sense, no doubt that is true: but is it a reason why He should leave the door of eternal fellowship open to disobedience?

Surely it must please Him better that man should be happy even if disobedient.—But supposing it does not, what then? He has declared He is displeased with disobedience. Could you urge any reason against His being displeased with disobedience? Is not obedience beautiful and good? If so, is it not better that He should be displeased with disobedience than that He should be pleased or indifferent to it?

You press me closely.—With reason. Now, if sin is hurtful to man and displeasing to God, is it not according to reason that a state of evil should accompany the ascendancy of sin ?

Yes, but as I understand it is sin we did not commit—sin of Adam before we were born—helpless sin—unintentional sin; why should we suffer for that ?—Not for that only. It is not Adam's sin only. It is our own sin as well. Is there a man who has not sinned ? Is not the whole world sunk in sin ?

If I say, "Yes," I concede your point.—Can you say "No" ?

I admit the world is in a bad way.—Is it not in a disobedient way ? And is not this sin ? Paul says Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. Now if sin reigns in the world from generation to generation, what objection of reason can there be to the reign of evil ?

But why should goodness permit the necessity for evil arising ? And why should Omnipotence suffer it to continue. I should have thought a Great and Powerful and All-wise Being would have prevented the mischief at the root; and at the least, having suffered it to come, I should have expected Him to apply a remedy that would take it entirely away.—Here again, you unwittingly place your judgment against His. I admit there would be great force in your questions and suggestions if evil had come to stay. I could not answer you on the popular supposition of an eternal hell.

Oh, you don't believe in the eternity of evil then ? —Not in the popular sense.

In any sense ?—I believe the judgment of God will always prevail, to the extinction of evil and evil men; but not that sin means eternal torment for any.

Well, that eases the problem of some of its difficulty.—My friend, there is no difficulty when you survey the matter from the Divine point of view, which is the only point of view it truly has, for man is nothing. Especially does all difficulty vanish when the end of the matter is taken into view.

Chapter 17

LOOKING TOO MUCH AT THE CREATURE

WELL, my friend, are you any more at your ease?—Not much. All our talk must necessarily leave the subject just where it is. We cannot alter matters in any way.

No: but we may change our own relation to matters, which may be as great a change sometimes as if we changed matters themselves.—Well, yes, there is something in that.

Tidings makes all the difference in the world sometimes, as when a man hears of a great opportunity, or a great danger, in which all depends upon prompt action. Conviction as to God's existence makes a great difference as to a man's relation to God, though it cannot alter things as they actually are with God.

My point last month was the existence of evil. You said that all difficulty vanished when the end of the matter was taken into view.

What did you mean?—I meant that when God's work with the earth was finished, there would be

none of the difficulties you mentioned. He proposes the end of all evil: "no more curse: no more death" is the oracular enunciation of His purpose.

I do not quite see that that disposes of the difficulty.
—I think it does.

It will not alter the fact, that curse and death have been allowed—No.

Why does He allow them?—As part of the process by which greater well-being is prepared.

I might feel the force of that if all participated in the result.—So they will in the sense of the curse ceasing.

Yes, but all do not share in the deliverance, as I understand you. Only a few are to be saved.—Such is the revealed purpose of Eternal Wisdom.

It is there that I feel a difficulty.

Why should it be a difficulty?—I do not know that I can tell.

I think I know the root of the matter. You look exclusively to the creature God has made, and to what you may conceive as the rights of the creature so made. You do not consider the purpose that God may have had in the making of the creature, nor of the rights that He necessarily possesses over it.—I confess my feelings are naturally more with the creature than the Creator.

You must fight this tendency. You must bring reason to your aid. It cannot be that the creature should govern the Creator, or that our interpretation of the Creator's way should be found in the creature's feelings rather than in the Creator's designs.—It is easier to realize the creature's feelings.

Granted; but you will allow that darkness of all kinds is easier than light.—You would not call the creature's feelings darkness, would you?

It would depend. If one of the Manyema tribe wanted to eat you, it would be because he felt inclined. You would consider his feelings rather dark on that subject, should you not?—(*Smiles*) I would consider his feelings misplaced.

Misplaced feeling is darkness. This you will find to be true in every relation. Your feelings are misplaced on the subject of mortal man.—I am in darkness, you think?

It is not your choice, I am sure; but any opposition to Divine wisdom in the name of the creature must be darkness. Why should mortal man criticize the ways of God? Is it not his place simply to ascertain them and submit to them?—To that, of course, I could not demur: the question is, what are His ways? He is great and kind, and my difficulty is to reconcile this with the evil state of things to which vast numbers of His creatures are subject.

We may be quite sure that none of His works are inconsistent with His greatness, and His kindness. I submit that it is no assumption to maintain this.—Granting His existence and His character and what you call His “works,” I should, of course, feel called upon to assent to that.

Very well, are you prepared to deny His existence?—Far be it from me to say there is no God. Whatever difficulties I may feel, I cannot take the fool’s position. There is too great a display of intelligence in the constitution of things everywhere, for me to resist the conviction that however little I may know Him, there is a vast and incomprehensible Being at work somehow. At the same time, I should not be true to the highest principles of my own existence if I were to shut my eyes to what appear to me difficulties in the way of the commonly accepted views.

I do not ask you to shut your eyes to anything, but rather to open them a little more widely so that you may perceive that the dimness you feel is a dimness as of steam on your own window glass, and not in the universe of God that you are looking out upon.—It is a pretty comparison. Perhaps it is correct.

I am sure it is. You flounder because you are holding on from below instead of from above. You look at a man who had no existence yesterday and who will have no existence to-morrow, and you are trying to interpret things as they bear upon or appear to him instead of looking to God, who has always been and always will be, and who has made all things for His own purpose. You will never be able to handle matters aright till you fully realize the truth that human life is but a vapour, and that in God and not in man is to be found the solution of the problems of the universe.—It is difficult for man to look at matters from God's point of view.

Still, the point of view exists; and it existed before man existed, and therefore, true reason demands that we ascend to it. Consider how it is with those not yet born, and with those who never will be born. You have no difficulty in assigning to their point of view its proper insignificant place?—I don't know that I quite understand you there. How can there be a point of view for those who never will be born?

They would have a point of view if they were born.—But how can you take them into account if they are not to be born?

Only that we may the more easily see how insignificant is the point of view of those who are born.—I fail to follow you, I confess. Persons that are not persons cannot be taken into account in any way.

They can be taken into account as persons that

might be but are not. Take the last emigrant ship that foundered at sea. There were on board many young couples from whom, had the ship got safely to land, there would certainly have sprung multitudes of persons who will now never have any existence. Does their potential point of view offer any difficulty in determining the problem of the earth's condition? My suggestion is that our own point of view, though important to us for the time being, is just as uninfluential as theirs in the question of why things are as they are. It is God's question purely, and His answer is necessarily the only answer.

Chapter 18

GOD'S ANSWER

You said last month that God's answer to the question why things are as they are was necessarily the only answer. To this, I could not demur if the answer has been given. To what do you refer when you speak of God's answer?—I spoke in the abstract when I spoke of God's answer. I did not refer specifically to a particular form of that answer. If I were to do so, it would be to the communication God made to Israel by the prophets and apostles.

To the Bible?—Yes, I firmly believe Paul's statement in the first chapter of the Hebrews, that "God at sundry times and divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, and in the last days of Judah's Commonwealth, by His Son."

I do not see how we can be affected by what may have been said in ages past.—There is no difficulty there. What was said was written, and we have the writing.

Are you sure of that?—I cannot be otherwise than sure in the presence of the evidence.

Where is the evidence?—It is both of a very palpable and of a very multiform character.

My question was, where?—Well, it is before our eyes and in the world around.

I would like to see it.—The difficulty is not to see it; it consists of facts so visible upon the earth at the present moment—not concealed or difficult to find, but as palpably before our eyes as the hills.

Be particular.—Well, there is, first, the Bible itself; secondly, the Jews; thirdly, the existence of Christianity; fourthly, the land from which they all sprang, corresponding topographically and monumentally with the history of all three, and with the requirements of the prophecy contained in the Bible.

I do not see how that class of facts contains proof of what you said.—The proof will become apparent if you treat the facts in detail. Take the Bible first. It is not a curiosity in the possession of a few: it is in the hands of all nations. It is not of recent origin: it has been the most conspicuous object in public literature during all the centuries that have run since the Roman emperors ruled the world. It is not a book of private origin: it is made up of public documents. It is not a frivolous book: it is the gravest and most serious book under the sun. It is not a speculative book: it is pre-eminently a record of facts. From the five books of Moses to the book of Revelation, it is a recital of matters of personal and practical experience; and if it is true in the simplest sense, the fact of revelation is proved without another effort. It records numerous incidents and transactions in which God is alleged to have taken part, and it claims for the bulk of its messages

that they are directly from the Lord, saying, "Thus saith the Lord." If the Bible is true in the ordinary sense, then the fact of revelation is proved.

What do you mean by the ordinary sense?—The narrative sense—the historic sense—the sense in which you ask if a witness is speaking the truth when he is alleging certain things to have occurred in his presence. Grant the Bible the most ordinary veracity and revelation is proved.

I do not quite see it.—It must be so when you consider the character of its testimony. The five books of Moses, for example, record transactions in which the writer, Moses, took a personal part throughout. Now the record is that God appeared to him by the angel in the bush: that afterwards he visited Egypt by God's command, and demanded Israel's release; that on Pharaoh's refusal, a succession of miraculous plagues were inflicted on Egypt, continued or removed at the prayer of Moses; that finally, Israelites, marching out of Egypt, were pursued by Pharaoh, and escaped through the opened Red Sea, in which Pharaoh and his army found their grave: that after this, the Israelitish congregation were led to Sinai, where God visibly manifested Himself in an impressive manner before the whole congregation; and through Moses (called up to the mount) gave them a law which has been unchanged in their hands for more than 3,000 years. My contention is that if this narrative is true in the most ordinary sense, the fact of God having revealed Himself is proved.

That is really the whole question. Of course, if revelation has taken place, it has taken place, but I do not see that anything is proved by that way of putting it.—I think

all is proved if you take it step by step; because, mind you, the case of Moses is only the beginning. If you take those that came after Moses, it is all of the same character—Joshua, for instance; or Samuel, or David, or Elijah, or any or all of the prophets, they all write or speak of things seen or heard by themselves. It is not an affair of belief on their part, but of knowledge. It is not a case of argument or opinion. The Gospel narrative is a narrative of things done, and witnessed by the writers; extending over a length of time, embracing many incidents of very differing complexions, but all alike in this that they were the works of God, especially the resurrection of Christ, of which the Apostles publicly proclaimed themselves witnesses.

Of course, if the Bible is true, it is true.

Do you say it is a lying book?—I would not like to say that.

If it is not a lying book, it must be a true book, because it is the testimony of the original witnesses. It is not written at second hand. The sincere record of those who merely believed on the testimony of others might be a mistaken affair, though sincere; but it cannot be so with the sincere testimony of eye-witnesses.—You have a faculty of summing up the thing in a very comfortable way.

It is a simple problem of reason, not calling for any forensic faculty in particular, or requiring a love of comfort. Do you deny any of the premises in the argument?—I do not know.

The existence to the Bible you are bound to admit?—Yes.

And that it has existed during all the Christian era?—Well, yes.

And that it was written by its professed authors? —I am not so sure about that.

How can you doubt it? The epistles of Paul, for example, as documents addressed to churches, would have been peculiarly liable to detection, would they not, if they had not been written by him? Those churches would know that no such epistles had been addressed to them. In that case, both Paul and the churches would have disclaimed them, and this repudiation would soon have become known; whereas, you are aware, they have been accepted as the letters of Paul from their first day of publication till now. Is not this proof of their authenticity?—Some people say they might have been written by some one wishing to pass them off as Paul's.

My friend, you do not go by what people idly say. You judge a matter by evidence. The epistles themselves are evidence, even if we did not know that they had been received as Paul's from the beginning. It is not in the range of possible moral achievement that a frivolous or designing character could write such letters. They are not ordinary performances.—I admit that they are out of the ordinary line.

The same argument applies to all parts of the Bible. There was always a multitude so related to the question of the authorship as to have secured contradiction if it was not as professed. There is unbroken acceptance of authorship from the beginning, and there is in every part of it inherent evidence of truthfulness. Truth and candour are its most manifest qualities. No one with open eye can read it without being impressed with a sense of purity, and authority and majesty, which no other book can

impart. You instinctively feel that the spirit of truth breathes in it.—That is a question of individual impression.

No habitual readers of the Bible, so far as I know, are of any other opinion. Its enemies, of course, express a different view, but its enemies are not its readers. But, however, its authenticity cannot be upset by any of the principles applicable in the determination of such a point; and therefore you are in this position, that you must either hold that these recorders of professed historical facts were liars, or else that their narratives being true, revelation has occurred.

Chapter 19

CO-ORDINATE TRUTH

HAVE you thought over the arguments brought forward last month?—Yes.

What have you to say to them?—I think there is much force in them; in fact, I am inclined to think they cannot be disposed of.

I am glad to hear you say so. You seemed to hang back unreasonably, I thought.—Well, I like to hold out till I cannot hold out any longer. Honestly, I think this is the case on the Bible argument. Still, even conceding this, there are difficulties which I do not feel capable of clearing away to my own satisfaction—difficulties, I mean, as to the exhibition of God which the Bible gives us in various places. I admit that the conception it places before us, as to His greatness, His eternity, His kindness, His wisdom, etc., are all such as we should look for in a revelation of Him; but there are views and aspects which strike me as petty and incongruous, and, if I may so say, foreign to the general idea advanced.

If you would particularize some of these views and aspects, we might consider them.—Well, there is what has been termed the “tribal” aspect of the Divine procedure as exhibited in the Bible, which seems to me inconsistent with the idea of a universal God. Then there is His shewing anger, which I have a difficulty in reconciling with the idea that He is love. The requiring of sacrifice as the basis of human approach seems to me to present the same contradiction. Then there is something so very local in the recorded manifestation of Deity which staggers me when I think of the insignificance of the earth in the boundless realms of creation. The idea of God coming down to speak with Abraham, and His dwelling in a temple, and of His taking Christ to His right hand, is in my mind unadjustable to the infinite scale of things mapped out in the sky. I can understand such ideas being conceivable and receivable at a time when it was supposed the earth was the universe, and the sun, moon, and stars were lights hung up in the sky for its convenience; but now that we know that the earth is relatively but a speck in the boundless fields of space, that the sun is about a million times larger than the earth, and that the myriads of fixed stars hung in the sky are all of them suns, most of them larger than our sun, these ideas referred to seem excluded by the mere magnitude of things. I feel simply paralysed in any attempt to harmonize them. I admit the strength of the argument for the Bible as a Divine thing. At the same time, I cannot help a feeling of distress at the want of the correspondence which I should have expected between the views it propounds and the actual constitution of heaven and earth as discovered by modern science.

You state your difficulties with clearness and force, and your earnest candour must necessarily secure for them respectful consideration. They can all be cleared away, I am certain; but it will be necessary to take them one at a time, and to frankly admit, one by one, the elementary facts which, when all put together, yield the solution.—I am prepared to admit anything, I believe, that I perceive to be true; and I feel encouraged somewhat by your confident assurance that the difficulties can be cleared away.

I do not express the assurance lightly. The difficulties you describe are all such as must have occurred to every reflective believer of the Bible; and must receive at least an approximate solution before faith can rest with strength and satisfaction.—It is my leading encouragement to hold converse with you on the matter, that you do not displace natural truth in your arguments for the truth of the Bible. I have met extreme defenders of the Bible, who have denied geology and astronomy. Their arguments for the Bible could naturally have no weight with me in those circumstances. Whatever vagaries may have been broached by students of geology and astronomy, there is a solid basis of truth in both sciences that I can no more shut my eyes to than to the existence of the Bible.

I concur. Natural truth must not be ignored. It must be allowed its place. The problem is to give it that place without doing violence to other truth. This problem is not usually solved with success. Where you meet with one extreme Bible-defender of the type you mention—who would deny the most obvious demonstrations of science because of his inability to square them with his reading of the Bible—you will meet with a hundred of another type

who, without openly rejecting the Bible, will squeeze and crush and destroy it, to harmonize with the extravagant conclusions at which mere speculative science has arrived. The only tenable ground is the acceptance of unmutated truth in both cases, and their fusion into a harmonious whole.

That is what I want to arrive at.—You are on the road. You have made a great stride in conceding the Bible argument. Science you already recognize. You have only to put the two together.

It seems to me easier said than done. I have indicated what I might call the unmixability of the two things.—Yes; you are in the position of a person who hasn't learnt the trick of a puzzle. He is shewn two rings: he is assured one can be made to pass into the other so as to form a link. He examines them: he does not see how it can be done: he tries—and fails: and tries and tries again many times: and still he fails. If he is a wise man, he will lay them down with the admission that the thing is beyond his ability. If he is a fool, he will impatiently protest that he is being fooled and that the thing cannot be done. There is a third alternative: a friend may shew him how the thing is done, and he experiences the satisfaction of performing the apparently impossible. Too many are in the position of the fool.

I hope I am not a fool. I hope I shall always guard against the mistake of rejecting a truth because I cannot make it square with some other truth.—That is the mistake that a great many make in this matter. The true policy is to seek truth and wait its reconciliations. They will come to patient and honest search. Even in the sciences we have spoken of it has often happened that facts have seemed

to look in two directions at once: that is to say, two facts or two sets of facts have seemed to look opposite ways. Haste would have discarded one of them, and come to wrong conclusions. Patience has found the explanation, and preserved both. Scientific men are pre-eminently distinguished by patience in this department. How much more essential it is to be patient with Divine truth whose issues are so momentous, especially considering the extreme liability of the human intellect to be superficial, and therefore erring in its reading of such lofty matters.

I agree with you, and have therefore resisted the temptation to come to a negative conclusion. I desire to come to a conclusion in harmony with your own. For this reason, I shall be interested to hear how you deal with the difficulties I have outlined.—We shall enter upon their consideration the next time we meet.

Chapter 20

MAN'S STATE AND GOD'S METHOD

OUR business this time is to consider those features of Bible revelation which you indicated last month as interfering with your acceptance of the truth.—That is how I understand the programme.

The best plan I think will be to make them the subject of colloquy. I always find we get quicker to the marrow of a difficulty by questioning the man who feels the difficulty, than by any amount of set argument.—If you think so, I have no objection, though I confess it would give me entire pleasure to listen to exposition.

You mentioned the “tribal” aspect of the Divine procedure exhibited in the Bible. By this, I suppose you mean the limitation of the word and work of revelation to the Jewish race?—Yes, and not merely revelation, but redemption itself as I understand it. The Jews are spoken of as the chosen people, and all other races as heathen and alien, having nothing to

do with the plan of things that God is working out in the earth.

It is true that matters stand in that way. Moses told Israel when he brought them out of Egypt, that God had "chosen them to be a special people unto Himself above all people that were upon the face of the earth" (Deut. vii. 6). And God Himself says by Amos: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos iii. 2). As concerning other nations, it said: "Thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by Thy name" (Is. lxiii. 19). "He hath suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts xiv. 16).—It is that which staggers me.

Why should it stagger you?—I should have thought that all men would be of equal value to God, and that every race would have received alike of His beneficent attention.

Why should you think so? May not the beginning of your difficulty be in a wrong thought on this point?—It seems to me so much a matter of course. We have all been taught this doctrine from infancy.

What if the doctrine be false?—It would surprise me very much that such a doctrine should be false.

Is it true that all men or any men are of value to God as such? This is the first question to settle. How can we settle it except by God's own declaration? No man can know how things appear to God. God must tell us: He has told us by word and deed. Take the deeds first, as they are louder than words. In the beginning He sentenced Adam and Eve to death, and drove them out of Eden for their want of submission to His will. In the days of Noah, He destroyed the world's entire population by a flood, because "all flesh had corrupted His way."

In the days of Abraham, for a similar reason, He destroyed the most beautiful part of Palestine by fire, and the inhabitants with it. In the days of Moses, He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt and drowned an whole Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Shortly afterwards, He sentenced the whole congregation of Israel, His own people, to die in the wilderness for their unbelief and disobedience. For a thousand years, He afflicted them much for their non-conformity with His requirements, and at last fulfilled the terrible threat that He would gather them into the midst of Jerusalem as they gather silver and brass and iron and lead and tin into the midst of the furnace, and would blow upon them in the fire of His wrath until they were melted in the midst of it (Ezek. xxii. 19-21). These dispensations of His judgment shew us of how little value flesh and blood is to Him when out of harmony with Him. Consider now how they harmonize with His declarations: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field all nations before Him are as nothing: and they are counted to him *less than nothing and vanity*" (Is. xl. 6, 17); "God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were *any that did understand* that did seek God. *Every one of them is gone back*: they are altogether become filthy. There is none that doeth good, no not one" (Psalm liii. 2); "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23); "The whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John v. 19); "What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?" (Ps. viii. 4). If these things are true, is it not a mistake to speak of man's value or importance to God?—Of course,

we all understand that man is finite and of little account in comparison with the Eternal; but I don't see that that disposes of my difficulty, because if mankind in general are of little account, so are Jews, and the question would still remain, "Why did God limit his operations to the Jews?"—If you realize that the human race as a whole is of small importance, one great difficulty will be out of the way, because the question would then be, not "Why did God leave mankind in general without notice?" but, "How came He to condescend to have dealings with any part of the race at all?" The difficulty that lurks in your mind is due to the common assumption that man is immortal, and must live either happy or miserably in the state to which it is supposed death introduces him. Admit that man is mortal and sinful and ephemeral, and you will find that the difficulty about God working in a limited circle is gone.

I do not quite see that: because, suppose I grant man is mortal, and that the race is perishing generation after generation like the vegetation that decays season after season, I would have to assume that all wanted saving as much as any part: and why then this tribal limitation?—"Wanted saving": the fallacy would lie there. You have too narrow a view of that phrase. A man who is dead does not "want saving" in the same way as we think of a living person wanting saving who is in any peril. He exists not, and is therefore not the subject of anything he requires to be saved from. It is a question of his reproduction: and this is entirely governed by the other question of God's objects in the case. Will it serve His purpose to bring him back? This depends upon His purpose. He has declared His purpose concerning the earth

to be, to fill it at last with His glory, in the sense of peopling it with a race who shall glorify and serve Him in the perfection of a trained submission and an incorruptible nature. It would not be compatible with this purpose to re-produce generations of men who know and obey Him not. Therefore you cannot speak of them "wanting saving": because their re-production is not wanted either by the fitness of the Divine purpose, or by their own desires, which when dead have no existence, and when living have no affinity for the Divine service.

I begin to see my notions are somewhat crude.—There wants but another ingredient in the case to banish the tribal difficulty. Concede that God knows His own purpose, and that He knows best how to accomplish it, you can have no difficulty in granting that the course adopted is the best. 't is the declaration of the Scriptures that "He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, none staying His hand, or saying unto Him, 'What does thou?' " My friend, it must be so. His own question is unanswerable: "With whom took He counsel? Who instructed Him and taught Him the path of judgment, or taught Him knowledge, or shewed to Him the way of understanding?"

I must, of course, admit that Eternal Wisdom can have had no teacher. At the same time, I desire to be able to see the wisdom of the Eternal ways.—That is legitimate; but the same cannot quite be said of the criticism of the Eternal ways. Wherein this criticism is due to ignorance, it must disappear before knowledge. Wherein it is due to incapacity of discernment, it is presumptuous and hopeless, and must be left to itself.

I hope I am not presumptuous.—I am far

from suggesting it. Yet I pray you to help yourself by taking the modest attitude of a created being. God has been pleased to select a man and his posterity as the basis and centre of His operations in working out the purpose of His beneficence upon the earth; and it is not for us to stand apart in grandiloquent remark and surmise (like the wise of this world), as if it were possible for mortal men to improve upon the ways of the Eternal. Our part is to come close to His way, and unite with it, and rejoice with, and keep it, so far as it is permitted to man to do so. The very "tribalism" will then be a thing to glory in, instead of to stumble at, as the method by which it has pleased God to proceed in accomplishing His final purpose with the magnificent globe in which we dwell, from whose face the disobedient and presumptuous are destined to disappear as entirely as the extinct animals, while the enlightened and the docile and obedient will live for ever in the full enjoyment of perfect life and well-being.

Chapter 21

HUMAN CLAY AND DIVINE ANGER

I THINK we disposed of the tribalism last month?—
Well, in a measure.

If there is anything more to be said on behalf of the objection, say on.—I don't know that there is anything definite to be said beyond what I said last month. Your remarks no doubt fairly met the objection, if I concede what you took for granted about man. Of course, if man is nothing more than so much living clay, Reason can have no criticism to offer on any limitation in God's method of hewing the race into the shape He desires.

Investigation will shew you that that is the state of the case. The Bible is not responsible for the philosophical theories that represent man as an immortal being capable of what is called a disembodied existence. Clay is the very figure it uses: "We are the clay, Thou our potter; we all are the work of Thy hand" (Is. lxiv. 8). If this be the state of the case, then Paul's question is reasonable: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to

make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour ? ” What is this but “ tribalism ? ”—As I have said, granting the clay element, there is nothing to be urged against it except the sentiment of pity we cannot help feeling for the multitudes that come into existence only to perish.

That is, is go out of existence again.—Well ?

Do you think that is a hardship ?—From their point of view—Yes.

Do you feel it a hardship in the case of cows and sheep ?—But you see they are not men.

Still, they come into existence and have some sort of pleasure while they are in existence, and then go out again. Is it a difficulty with you that there is such an endless procession of disappearing animals ?—I might feel it a difficulty if they had the same keen sense of existence that we have.

Then is it the keenness of conscious sense that makes the difficulty ?—I think so.

What, then, about the hundred thousand idiots and lunatics in England alone ? Would you feel less difficulty about them than about a hundred thousand sane men ?—You press me closely. I do not know what to think about idiots and lunatics. Doubtless the hardship would not be so great in their case.

But, now, why should the keen sense of existence which man has be a difficulty in the way of recognizing that his life is “ but a vapour that appeareth for a very little while and then vanisheth away ? ”—I do not say it interferes with that if that be the truth. What I say is that we cannot but regard the objectless existence of multitudes, which your view seems to involve, without feelings of sadness.

Ah, well, that in another thing. The "valley of the shadow of death," as the present state is called, cannot but be a place of gloom and sadness. The object of my question is to shew that sentiment can be no guide in the determination of truth, and further, that the relapse of a created being into a state of non-existence is not the evil thing in itself that it is liable to appear to a living being fearing death for himself. It would be different if the death of the unsaved meant their entrance into a state of endless misery. The purpose of God is the only stable and determining standpoint of contemplation in the case. If we once fairly grasp the idea that He is the author of all secondary existence, and that He is evolving the universe on His own plan, and for His own objects, all difficulty from the human point of view must vanish.

I am disposed to admit that. But what about this anger which God is represented as shewing so often? The very nation that He chose and delivered from Egypt, it is said, He afterwards destroyed.—Yes, my good friend. I regard that as one of the most powerful evidences of the truth of the story, and a most signal illustration of the sovereign prerogative of the latter.

Taking the truth of it for granted, which I am not disposed to dispute, what have you to say about the display of anger where love only is supposed to dwell?—I deny the "supposition:" we must take God as He is revealed and not as He is "supposed" to be. I do not accept the current view that love only is the attribute of God.

But the New Testament says that God is love.—Yes, but not love only. It also says, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29).

It is difficult to reconcile the two things.—Why? Cannot separate attributes co-exist in one character? Are you not sensible of both love and abhorrence in the composition of your mental man?

Yes, but we are speaking of God. God is not a man.—Truly so, but if it is testified that anger is with God as well as love, and if we see anger and love harmoniously blending in our own character, why should we have any difficulty in conceiving of a similar blend in the Divine character.

There is such a difference between God and man.—Granted, but there is a sufficient resemblance to admit of this argument from one to the other. Man is made in the image of God: this is the testimony. He is the miniature resemblance of Him in his mental and moral characteristics. Therefore the argument returns: If man is capable of anger as well as love, why should it be a difficulty that God is so?

My difficulty would be as to the existence of anger in God at all.—There, my friend, you are ballooning. You are not guiding your thoughts by facts, but by imaginations. You do not mean to dictate to God what He ought to be, do you? You want to know what He is?

I wish to know the truth.

Very well, why should you raise a difficulty about the existence of anger, seeing it is testified of God and seen in man?—I don't know why I should raise a difficulty about it; but it seems to me that love is much more rationally the attribute of Divinity.

You want to analyse your thoughts. You are allowing yourself to be governed by the mere bias of human sentiment. You must school yourself into subjection to

fact. As a matter of experience and reason, there can be no more objection to anger than to love. It is indeed a necessary complement of love. Love without the capacity of anger would be impotent. Anger in its full exercise is both the reprehension of that which is opposed to goodness, and the power to remove it. As to what is goodness, God only is the Judge, and He is consequently the only standard of righteous anger. In proportion as we learn of Him, we know what is good, and in proportion as we imitate, we give legitimate exercise to that abhorrence of evil which is His characteristic, and which in executive expression is anger. You must get rid of the idea that God's goodness is only a sort of honeyed passivity. Far, far from this is the case, whether we judge Him by His manifestation in Nature or Revelation. In Nature, we see pain in every deviation from law; death in every interference with life's conditions; destructive violence in every departure from equilibrium. Storm and conflagration and earthquake and massacre are as much aspects of Nature as sunshine and safety and peace. Therefore, it is not strange that there should be a rough side to the character of the Divine Power out of whom all things have proceeded. And when we see that this roughness is declared and illustrated in the attested acts of His power, and further, that this roughness is never manifested except in the destruction of that which is evil and the conservation of that which is good, there can be no difficulty to true reason in the testified fact that God is capable of being angry as well as "gracious and merciful, long-suffering, slow to anger and of great kindness."

Chapter 22

THE POSITION OF SACRIFICE

WE discussed the question of Divine anger last time. I think your next difficulty was the appointment of sacrifice?—Yes. I have been accustomed to regard it as anomalous that sacrifice should be required as an element of religious service; especially, the sacrifice of Christ. I must acknowledge my inability to understand why the good and the pure and the holy should be crucified, as Jesus Christ was, before God could allow man to approach Him or hope for salvation.

If you admit that God requires sacrifice in the approaches of man, you ought to have no difficulty in receiving the fact.—I cannot receive anything that appears to stultify truth.

I am afraid if you had been Abraham when he received command to offer up his only son, Isaac, in whom posterity had been promised, you would not have been so prompt to obey.—I don't know how it might have been had I received so direct a

command as he did. I grant it might have seemed a difficulty how God required me to shed man's blood, after having forbidden it, and how He could ask me to destroy a son in whom issue promised had not yet taken place. But, perhaps, in the presence of His actual requirement, I would not have felt these scruples. I hope I am not a rebel.

The sentiment of insubordination is at the root of many of the religious difficulties of men.

You are rather hard.—I do not mean the remark in any offensive sense. I intend it in the scientific sense—that is, in the sense of fact coolly noted.

That makes the matter worse.—I hope not. I am looking away from persons and dealing neutrally with truth. Jesus utters the sentiment in another way, when he says "*If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.*" As much as to say, if there be not first a docile and willing mind, there can be no perception of the truth. Indeed, He plainly says this in another case: "*Except a man humble himself as a little child, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*" To the opposite state of mind he refers thus: "How can ye believe that *receive honour one of another* and seek not the honour that cometh from God only."

We are straying from the point, are we not?—Just a little, perhaps. I was meaning to suggest that your discernment of the fact that God requires sacrifice ought to relieve you of all difficulty as to His reason.

I suppose it ought, but we naturally desire to understand, and especially to get rid of, anything that appears to violate our understanding.—It is possible to understand this question of sacrifice if you admit the elementary principles out of which it arises.

What are they?—First of all, take the fact which God declared to Moses: “I will be sanctified in them that approach unto me.” Look this well in the face and realize to yourself whether you admit it or no; that, as God said to Malachi, “I am a great King,” and that “His name must be magnified and had in reverence of all those who come near to Him” (Mal. i. 14; ii. 2; *Psa.* lxxxix. 7; *Lev.* i. 3).

I could not, of course, demur to such a sentiment.—You may not demur; but do you really feel the sentiment? I fix your attention here, because it is the root of the matter in question. No man can enter into the meaning of sacrifice who fails in the discernment of God’s greatness, and in the feeling of reverence and awe towards Him which that discernment will inspire when allowed to have its full effect. The great failing of our age, as Carlyle used to say, is “the want of reverence.”

I must admit the truth of the impeachment. I desire to be innocent in the matter. I hope I am sufficiently under the power of reason (to put it on no higher ground) to recognize the majesty and sacredness of the Divine Being.—It is astonishing how easily people feel the dignity of human greatness. The greatness of God does not touch them in the least, when the presence of royalty, or even of a judge on the bench, will fill them with a sense of awe and deference.

We must make some allowance for the difference between faith and sight.—That is, doubtless part of the explanation. In the present case, there is no need for the allowance. You recognize the greatness and majesty of God. Is it not, therefore, reasonable that in permitting approach to Him, He should appoint acts of extreme reverence on the part of the worshippers?

That, of course, I cannot deny, and I would have no difficulty in understanding bowing or kneeling, or entire prostration as the expression of reverence; but sacrifice——?—Here you require another of the elementary principles to which I referred. Surrender to it as frankly, and your difficulty will be gone.

What is it?—That the disobedience of any commandment of God (otherwise expressed by the term “sin”) is a heinous crime on the part of a created being; and that God’s intolerance towards it is so extreme that He will not hold communion with a sinner or suffer him to live. Can you object?

I don’t know that I can object if I am to receive what the Bible teaches.

You admit that the Bible teaches this, and you have admitted that the evidence of the Bible’s truth cannot be rejected. Where are we?—I suppose I am bound to assent to what you say.

Do you not think it reasonable that the insubordination of the creature should be a crime against the Creator?—I cannot say it is unreasonable.

Do you not think it reasonable that such a crime should put an end to friendly relations between them?—Suppose I must admit it, what then?

It would mean eternal breach.—I do not see where sacrifice comes in.

This is just where it does come in. God is kind as well as great. And He is willing for a healing of the breach, provided there be a recognition of His supremacy and submission on the part of the offender.

How does sacrifice ensure this?—It is the enactment of confession. The wages of sin is death; and when a sinner comes with sacrifice in his hand, laying his hand on its head, he identifies himself with it, and acknowledges, in its death, that he is

deserving of death. Thus both sin and the claims of God are confessed.

You are speaking of the sacrifice of animals.—Yes, they were first in the order of appointment.

It is the sacrifice of Christ that my mind is on, more particularly, as a difficulty. I could understand that the offering of an animal might be a suitable ceremony of contrition: but here is a righteous man put to death: I cannot so well understand that.—I grant there is more in that case than in the typical foreshadowings of the Mosaic law; still, the one was a prefigurement of the other.

How am I to understand you?—In the animal, sin was only typically condemned. In Christ, it was really so.

I do not understand that. How could sin be condemned in Christ who was no sinner?—By reason of the nature he obtained by derivation from his mother Mary. This was the nature common to all the sons of Adam, which inherits death from the condemnation passed upon the transgressor in Eden (Rom. v. 12, 18). When, therefore, his flesh was impaled on Calvary, sin was “condemned in the flesh” (Rom. viii. 3), and the basis of propitiation laid in the pouring out of his blood (Rom. iii. 25, 26). He was thus “made sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor. v. 21). If he had not been of our identical nature in the first place, I grant I could not answer your question.

But granting he was in our identical nature, I do not see what was accomplished?—Paul’s definition is an inspired one, and may be taken to cover the whole ground. He not only says, “Sin was condemned in the flesh,” but that the object was “to declare the righteousness of God” as a basis “for the

the *remission of sins* that are past through the *forbearance* of God, that He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (see Rom. iii. 25, 28). We therefore get the idea that in the death of Christ, human nature was federally crucified, and the righteousness of God in His dealings with the Adamic race, publicly asserted and vindicated, with this result, that the way was opened for God to shew His forbearance in our forgiveness, provided we humble ourselves by associating ourselves with this public declaration of His righteousness and vindication of His supremacy.

How can you do that?—Paul supplies the answer in saying that when believers are baptized into Christ, they are baptized *into his death*, in undergoing a burial in water which he styles "the likeness of his death" (see Rom. vi. 2, 6). By this submission to a death-resembling rite, they are said to be "crucified with Christ" which identifies them with the process to which Christ is his love submitted, and therefore stand humbly before God as confessors of their sin, that they may receive a free forgiveness through him who not only "died that we might live" but who, being raised from the dead, ever lives that he may act as intercessor between God and "all who come unto God by him."

I must say it is a different idea of the atonement from what I have always been accustomed to hear.—The clerical idea of the atonement creates difficulties that do not belong to the Bible exhibition of the subject.

The view you have presented removes some difficulty. Still, I should have thought the kindness of God would have have been equal to the forgiveness of sinners, without sacrifice of any kind.

—I must remind you that it is not what we think that settles the question of truth. If you will but realize that God is great and holy, as well as kind, the subject of sacrifice will present no difficulty. God is to be feared and venerated by the angels who please Him: how much more by man who is not only an impure creature of the earth, but a sinner deserving of death. It is nothing but fitting and beautiful in the highest degree that his permitted approaches should be in a form that keeps his own worthlessness, and God's great kindness and justice, always before his eyes.

Chapter 23

THE DIVINE UNITY

THE question of sacrifice we disposed of last month.—We considered it: it is not easily disposed of, do you think?

Well, I do not say it is easily disposed of, for it rests upon very subtle considerations, which it is not easy to make palpable. But I think we disposed of it so far as the exhibition and application of these principles render the subject intelligible.—I might be disposed to admit that. Still, I wish the subject were plainer.

It will become plainer with familiarity.—I hope so.

You would not be inclined to insist on your objections?—No: the whole subject of God and the subject of the Bible are so strongly supported by reason that I think myself bound to surrender all minor difficulties, especially when I think I see a sufficient glimmer of explanation as to make it probable that any difficulty I feel about them may be due to my own lack of understanding.

That is a reasonable attitude to take. It is the attitude belonging to all the points you have raised: the other points besides sacrifice I mean.

You have not yet gone over all the points.—Nearly, I think.

The greatest difficulty to my way of thinking has not been touched.—What was that?

The smallness and localness of the recorded manifestations of the Deity. The boundless magnitude of the universe seems inconsistent with the idea of God coming down to speak with Abraham, or dwelling in a temple, or taking Christ to His right hand. That was how I expressed it, and how it strikes me.

Oh yes, I remember. Well, that is how it may appear on the surface view, but you will admit that the surface view is not always the correct view.—Undoubtedly.

The surface view is that the stars are lamps hung out in the sky, as you expressed it. They look like that, but you know the real fact is very different from that.—Quite so.

It is so in the subject of God's manifestation as recorded in the Bible. There is a very local and petty look I grant about God walking and talking with Abraham, and going down to see Sodom, and appearing in a flaming bush to Moses, and residing in a tabernacle, and afterwards in a temple in Israel's midst, and so on; but we must look at these incidents in their connection with the whole conception of God presented to us in revelation. When we do this, they lose their pettiness and become features of a system of unutterable sublimity.—I shall be delighted to be made to see that.

You can do so by getting hold of and applying the first principles of the subject. There is no other

method of understanding the details of any matter.

What would you call the first principles of the subject?—Well, the primary and elementary truths concerning God as revealed. It is revealed that He is One, and that He is everywhere present. Realize these two points first.

It is rather difficult.—Not impossible. Unity and universality are conceivable ideas.

Conceivable but not realizable.—There may be a difficulty about the realizability, but that need not trouble you. There are many things that we know to be true that we cannot realize. The earth hanging on nothing, for example; or the endlessness of time and space; or the action of electricity on the telegraph, or of gravitation in the movements of the heavenly bodies. Your inability to realize these things does not interfere with their receivability. You receive them trustfully and conceive of them in a certain way though unable to form what is called a “mental concept” of them. Just allow yourself to be similarly exercised in this greater and far more important subject. Universality is a fact, and something fills that universality. Space is not empty space literally, for the whole universe is enwrapped in one energy. I now speak of the aspect of things to the scientific mind, and as they must appear to even the common mind on reflection. There is something between star and star, system and system, that holds all together as one system. Scientists do not know what it is, and are at a loss for a term of definition. The latest conception is “ether,” which they conceive of as something finer than electricity—finer than light. It is a mere speculation, but valuable as the recognition of a fact. Now this fact the Bible terms “Spirit.” “Whither shall I flee from thy Spirit?” “Do not I fill

heaven and earth ? ” “ Can any hide himself from Me ? ” Here is a first principle that we have nothing to do but just to receive with the docility of helpless reason.

But I understood you to speak of God; now you speak of Spirit.—The two terms are not separate, “ God is Spirit.” So Jesus told the woman at Jacob’s well.

I do not quite follow you there. You seemed to introduce Spirit as the synonym of what I might call the passive force of the universe scientifically conceived of as ether. Am I to understand that this is the Bible idea of God?—Only in part: the Bible reveals what science could not know—that this universal force or spirit has nucleus in a personal Father who centres in Himself the power and faculty potentially latent in the Spirit everywhere. Conceive of this glowing Father-centre as a unit with the diffused power that fills the universe, and you have one God, the Bible idea of God, and the first principle essential to the understanding of those records of manifestations of Deity that trouble you. He is ONE GOD and One Spirit—not two. The One God is One Spirit in His totality of Central Being and universal Spirit in diffusion.

The idea is difficult to grasp. What am I to understand by the One Father-centre being a unit with the diffused power that fills the universe?—The idea is that both form the One Being in whom no part can be separated from another part.

I do not follow you easily.—The idea can best be conveyed by illustration. Take the sun that shines in mid-day. He is one object: the light that streams from him seems to be another, yet the two are so indissolubly associated that you cannot separate them.

When the sun sets, the light disappears with him. The sun and his light are one though apparently and in a sense really two. If I say that the sun is a unit with his diffused light, you will gather what is meant by the Father being a unit with His diffused power, energy of the Spirit filling the universe. One God thus filling immensity while dwelling in heaven: and in Him, all things live and move and have their being. This is the first principle which affords a key to the interpretation of what you have called the local and petty forms of Deity-manifestation.

It may be so: but at present it seems to me to increase the difficulty, for how can a great God embracing the universe have come down to earth and had dealings with men in the local way recorded? —We shall go into that if we are spared to meet again next month.

Chapter 24

THE ANGELS

WELL, what are we to say to my difficulty about Omnipotence coming down to the earth and walking and talking like a man?—It is the old question of Solomon, “But will God indeed dwell upon the earth? Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have built.”

Yes, that seems to be the question. What is the answer?—The answer will be found in the existence and function of the angels.

The angels? Who are they?—You must, of course, have heard of them.

Yes, I have heard of them, but I imagined they were part of the pretty fable of pulpit theology, which I understand you have discarded.—We have discarded the fables, certainly, but not what may be true in orthodox religion.

What! Do you go in then for little chubby heads and winged seraphic spectres?—No, not that at all, but for the angels of the Bible, who are as real as men, though of higher nature.

This is new to me.—You will find it true. The subject of angels is interwoven with Bible history all the way down, from the appearance of two at Sodom the night before its destruction (Gen. xix. 1) to the appearance in Patmos to John of the angel that exhibited to him the scenes of the Apocalypse (Rev. i. 1; xxii. 6). If you will study the recorded cases of their appearance, you will find they are beings more real than man; for they not only can eat and drink, but are immortal, and have control over the powers of Nature.

That is an extraordinary idea.

Open your mind and you may see it but a higher form of truth than you have yet been accustomed to. You do not suppose man is the highest form of life in the universe?—Far be it from me to suppose such a thing; yet man is the highest form of life I have seen.

But not than you have heard of if you take the Bible into account?—(*Hesitatingly*), Well, no.

And you have admitted the argument for its truth?—Yes.

Realize for a moment, then, the Bible representation of the subject. It is not merely that the appearance of angels is recorded many times, but their existence is expressly recognized, as by David in Psa. ciii. 20, 21: "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; and ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure"; or still more weightily by Christ in His most frequent allusions to them, as when He says, "The Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him" (Matt. xxv. 31).—I have no doubt it is so if you declare it to be so. I am not so well

acquainted with the Bible as I should like to be. But what strikes me is the extraordinary character of the doctrine.

It all depends upon what you mean by extraordinary. If you mean out of the run of ordinary mortal experience, it is no doubt extraordinary, but a thing may be out of the run of ordinary mortal experience, and yet very true, such as the appearance of a double comet or the fall of red snow.—Granted.

The existence of angels may be extraordinary in the sense of being a thing of which the current generation has had no experience, but it is far from extraordinary in the sense of being improbable or anomalous. It seems to me in the highest degree intrinsically probable, and opens out a conception of the universe that is sublime. The universe subsists in God, whose one Spirit embraces and covers all, but it is not manipulated in detail by Him. Having received a fixed constitution by His power and wisdom, though His discernment penetrates it everywhere, He does not interfere in its operations; it is allowed to work itself out by the laws and affinities imparted to it, subject to the supervision of the immortal class of agents revealed to us as the angels who receive His "charge" (Matt. iv. 6), and execute His decrees (Dan. ix. 23; Ex. xxiii. 20-23). This exhibits the universe as a much more interesting field of intelligence than if operated mechanically by a law of celestial instinct as we might say: Just as the earth is much more interesting as the scene of human tillage than it would be as a seed-growing paradise in man's absence.—I might grant the beauty of the conceit if we were only permitted to have the same experience of the angelic management as we have of that of the horticulturists.

It is only a question of time, my friend, if you accept the teaching of Jesus. You may remember what he said to Nathanael: "Ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The accomplished experience of the past is the guarantee of what is to come.—Well, I might concede all that, but I do not see how it bears upon the fact of God coming down, etc., which you introduced it to explain.

One fact more is necessary to make the explanation obvious. The angels bear the name of God, and what they do, God is said to do.

Angels bear the name of God!—Such is the fact, my friend, however it may shock you at first sight. A verbal illustration of it you have in what was said to Moses concerning the angel that should accompany the Israelitish host on their journey to the land of promise: "Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, . . . *for My name is in him*" (Exo. xxiii. 20). Direct proof is to be found in the application of the name of God over and over again to the angels that appeared in various phases of the Divine work. Take two instances: "*The Angel of the Lord* appeared unto him (Moses) in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush. . . . Moreover he said, *I am the God of thy father*, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face: for he was *afraid to look upon God*" (Exo. iii. 2, 6). The other instance is when Moses led Israel out of Egypt. It is said (Exo. xiii. 18), that "God led the people," and that "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud" (verse 21). This, in chapter xiv. 19, is

declared to be "*the Angel of God* which went before the camp of Israel." This peculiarity you will find exemplified in Bible history over and over again.

It is an extraordinary peculiarity, I must say.

It may seem so, but it is the key to the difficulty you expressed in understanding what you described as the pettiness and localness of the recorded manifestations of the Deity. One God manifested in a plurality of subordinate agents is not an inconceivable idea, is it?—I must take time to think over it. I cannot say that it disposes of all my difficulty.

Chapter 25

GOD AND THE ANGELS

I WAS not satisfied with the brief conversation we had last month.—Well, my friend, it is not often given to mortals to be satisfied with anything.

That may be true: but there are degrees in our dissatisfactions.—I don't know that you had special cause for dissatisfaction.

Your explanations seemed to come too glibly. They struck me as being mechanical. You seemed to bring them out as the thing that was understood to be suitable rather than as what you felt to be true.—I regret if the great subject should have suffered from my manner. Human manner is liable to be the result of human infirmity: but wise men will reflect that the truth of a thing asserted is independent of the manner of its assertion.

That is of course true: but if I am to gather the truth of the thing asserted from the assertion of the assertor, I am naturally affected by his style of assertion.—Well, I hope there was nothing much amiss. The facts stated were complete in their

character, though they may have been somewhat scant in their amplification.

They did not meet my difficulties with the thoroughness of some of your explanations.—I think you will find they contained the elements of a solution.

My difficulty was the smallness and localness of the Biblically-recorded appearances of Deity when considered in the light of the vastness of the universe, and you put me off, if I might so say, with some Bible quotations about angels.—That is scarcely an accurate representation of the case. What I did was to give you a Bible clue to a Bible mystery. The mystery lies in the apparently limited actions on the part of the infinite and illimitable God who fills all space and time. The clue to the mystery lies in the mode of His action, revealed and illustrated in the ministration of angels.

Pardon me, but that does not appear to touch the difficulty. An angel is a created being. What an angel may do is the action of a created being. How can the action of a created being be an explanation to me of the procedure of an unlimited God, such as the Creator must necessarily be?—If that action is the procedure of the unlimited God, then certainly it is the very explanation you require. Angelic action is Divine action: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister?" This is Paul's enquiry.

But what connection can there be between created action and uncreated action?—Just the connection the Creator may establish. If He has chosen to incorporate His own energy in the form of superior and immortal beings, whom He employs in the execution of His designs in detail, it seems to follow that the action of these superior beings would be His

action. This is, at all events, the Bible account of the matter, and we must not leave it out of account in judging of Bible descriptions of the works of God. The things before your mind in the way of difficulties are all works of God; God talking with Abraham, God coming down to deliver Israel, etc. Now if, upon investigation, it turns out that angels were the actual operators in these cases, why should there be any difficulty in the way of accepting their action as the Divine action?

Simply, as I have said, because of the difference between the created and the uncreated.—You are allowing metaphysical distinctions to interfere with the obvious relation of facts. Metaphysics yield no guidance in these things, nor indeed in anything truly. They are the futile efforts of the human intellect to conceive the operation of the abstract and eternal. What we have to do with is facts. The testified fact before us is that God employs angelic beings to carry on His work in the universe; and with this fact before us, there ought to be no difficulty in understanding why their work should be spoken of as His work, or why His work should therefore sometimes appear to have a pettiness (as you called it), not conceivably attaching to the ways of Him who fills heaven and earth. When God went up from Abraham (Gen. xvii. 22) we easily recognize that it was an angel who did so. Or when it is said that God appeared to Moses, we know that what is meant is that an angel appeared to him, as is testified (Exodus iii. 2; Acts vii. 38).

But why is it not plainly said that an angel appeared in all these cases? Why should it be said that God did thus and so?—Because of the relation of God to the matter. The angels were but agents

and servants. They did not act of their own motion. They acted in performance of a work of God. Had they only been spoken of in the narrative of their achievements, God would have been hidden from view, and the mistake would have been made of attributing to them the things done in their capacity as His ministers merely. Would the lord of an estate consent to his servants appearing in his transactions and doing his pleasure in their own name? It was needful that the name of God should be on the angels and their work, that the relation of that work to Him might be known. On the other hand, it was necessary that the fact of their instrumentality should be visible, otherwise the mistake would have been made of regarding them as the actual Deity whose servants only they are. It seems to me that the case could not reasonably be in any other form than just the form in which we find it: the angels as the actors, yet God as the mover by them.

Why was it not so with the prophets and apostles? They were sent to speak the word of God: yet we never find, so far as I am aware, that God is said to do the things that they did.—No. The cases are different. The angels possess the divine nature, and are in unity with God, which cannot be affirmed of prophets and apostles, who were but men, whose nature is of the dust (Ecc. iii. 20). God is Spirit: and it is testified of the angels that “He maketh His angels spirits” (Psa. civ. 4), while of man it is said that he is “of the earth, earthy” and a “natural body” (1 Cor. xv. 44-47). It is, however, also said by Paul that there is a spiritual body, and that to this body, approved men will attain when this mortal body is changed, and made incorruptible by transformation through the action of the Spirit, at which

crisis Jesus says they will be "equal unto the angels." The angels are before us, therefore, as the sons of light and power, of whom it is not unnatural to speak as God when they come on the errands and do the works of God. The Divine power is manifest in the things they have done. They rained fire and brimstone on Sodom (Gen. xix. 22, 24); disabled Jacob with a touch (Gen. xxxii. 24; Hos. xii. 4); afflicted the Egyptians with plague and brought Israel out of Egypt (Exo. xv. 19); controlled the utterance and obstructed the way of the unrighteous prophet, Balaam (Num. xxii. 20, 22); consumed with fire the meal prepared by Gideon, and regulated the action of the dew on the fleece (Jud. vi. 21, 36-40); ascended in the flame of the sacrifice presented by Manoaah (Jud. xiii. 3, 16-20); ravaged the coasts of Israel with pestilence in punishment of Israel's sin (2 Sam. xxiv 16); decimated a whole Assyrian army in a night (2 Kings xix. 35); revealed the secrets of futurity to Daniel (Dan. ix. 21, 23); announced the birth of Christ beforehand, and celebrated its occurrence in celestial chorus on the plains of Bethlehem (Luke i. 26; ii. 10); liberated the apostles from prison (Acts v. 19; xii. 7, 11); besides shewing the course of history in advance to John in Patmos (Rev. i. 1).

You overwhelm me with texts. All these things may be true, but what can I do with them? What I wish to know is how they reconcile the pettiness of the Divine transactions with the greatness of a Being equal to the grasp and maintenance of an illimitable universe?—I should have thought the facts stated in the texts would have given you the clue. The newness of the idea to you may be the reason of your inability to see their bearing. I must not be discouraged; we may have better success next time.

Chapter 26

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE UNIVERSE

I AM afraid from the tone of your remarks last month, that we are not yet at the end of your objections?—I am giving you the chance of thoroughly flooring me.

That would be a pleasant way of looking at it if being floored, you would remain floored.—I shall always get up again, of course, if you leave me wind enough.

I have no inclination to get the better of you for the mere sake of the thing. I only wish to establish the most momentous truth we have been discussing—the most momentous it is possible to conceive.—Well, I think so far as I can judge myself, there is nothing I am so willing to have established. I am fully inclined to think with David that it is “the fool that says in his heart, There is no God.” At the same time, I wish the last cloud speck of an objection to be answered and disposed of. This is why I speak so frankly, and seem, perhaps, more of an unbeliever than I am.

So far, so good. What is your objection now?

Last month you said a good deal about angels. Why should there be angels?—Oh, my good friend, you might as well ask, Why should there be men? Why should there be stars? Why should there be anything?

Ah, but you don't catch my meaning. Your theory of God, as I might call it—speaking as yet as an outsider—seems to me to dispense with the need of angels.

How so?—Well, you speak of a Presence filling heaven and earth, and of a Being whose perception and power are co-extensive with this universal Presence. If this is a correct conception, does it not render angels superfluous? Why should God have angels to do what He can do Himself? The idea of a messenger or servant seems rather to belong to human weakness, does it not? We would not employ servants, I think, if we could do as easily as thought what we employ them to do?

I begin to get a glimmer of where you are.

Well, what have you to say?—I think it is facts we have to do with rather than any speculation as to whether facts might not have been otherwise.

But facts must agree with one another?—Doubtless they do so; but sometimes the agreement may not be obvious to our limited faculties.

Do you say, then, that you cannot reconcile the idea of angels with the fact of God's omniscience?—I do not say that. What I say is that the mode of the Divine subsistence, as I may phrase it, is necessarily too entirely beyond our knowledge to enable us to conclude that angelic instrumentality is a superfluity. What do we know of Spirit, still less its relation to the personal consciousness, power,

and wisdom of the Eternal Creator? We know of its existence: that is all. We know nothing of its nature or mode of operation.

I regret to hear you speak in such doubtful terms.—You need not; they are terms applicable to almost any branch of human knowledge. Air and light and life and gravitation are all things known as facts only. They are not comprehended in their essence. Even water is quite an inscrutable element, though so common.

I think you go too far there. The chemical ingredients of air and water are known.

But what do you know of the chemical ingredients? You call a certain gas oxygen or hydrogen, as the case may be. You know of the existence of these elemental gases: but do you comprehend what they are in themselves?—Their molecular constitution has been investigated; so many atoms combining with so many other atoms, in a certain order, produce gases or fluids or solids with certain fixed peculiarities.

Yes, you rattle it off easily enough, according to the text books of science.—It is not rattle, but fact.

Well, I mean that in the employment of these terms, you are still on the surface of things. You do not touch the bottom. What is an atom, and how did it originate?—I saw a suggestion the other day that atoms were minute rings of ether.

Yes, we live in the age of "suggestions," but where is the value of suggestion as the basis of actual knowledge? Who ever saw an atom? What is ether out of which an atom can be made? Is ether also made of atoms? How can that be if atoms are made of ether? What is light made of? What is gravitation made of? What is electricity made of? It does not solve the problem or evade

the difficulty to call them "modes of motion," as is the habit with the latest philosophy: motion of what? and how did it acquire the motion? and why are not all motions alike, and all atoms alike? and why is the universe not a wide Sahara of dead uniformity instead of the sparkling variegated frame of wisdom and power and diversity that we behold? No, my friend, no: all that we can know of facts is their superficial aspect; and therefore when I say that we only know of the existence of Spirit, but nothing of its essence or modes, I only say what is affirmable of the commonest branches of knowledge.

Well, what application do you make of that qualification to the subject in hand?—I look at space filled with Spirit in extension—invisible, subtle, simultaneous throughout the universe—having none of the limitations of space to which finite mortals stand related. The electrical achievements of this century enable me to understand how to this Spirit there is no distance, and no impediment, and that the Eternal Intelligence enshrined in the heart of it, as the Bible reveals, must needs be in touch with all parts of immensity and have control of all things.

That is the very idea that seems to me to exclude the idea of angels.—Ah, but you must take all parts of the subject. Though God thus fills and holds heaven and earth in Himself, it is evident that He has constituted them on a principle that gives them mechanical independence of Himself. They work by the laws and qualities He has imparted to them. They form, as it were, a framework in which He hides Himself as the latent Power while having all in His control.

That is your theory, isn't it?—No; not in the sense of fancy or guess. It is inevitable truth resulting

from the existence of God, as demonstrated in all the ways we have passed under review; and from the self-evident fact of the automatic action of the universe. The two things must be taken together. They yield this result—that God having made the universe, has taken up a passive position within it, as we might say, which possibly renders the employment of angels a necessity, notwithstanding that He knows all and can perform all; and if not a necessity, at least a pleasing mode of exercising His power—much more interesting, certainly, than working the universe by mere Spirit, as an engine is worked by steam.

You become less positive?—I think you see your answer. You may get it from the case of our own race. God was under no necessity to make man. But He has made him, and we must admit that the stuff incorporate in a living, intelligent, obedient and appreciative race is stuff in a more interesting form, than if it existed in the form of lifeless dust, or inorganic cloud, or moisture, or abstract Spirit.

I am afraid mankind are not so interesting as you make them out to be.—I am speaking of man as God intended him to be, and as he will be when God's purpose with him is accomplished. The argument is much more powerful when applied to the angels of His power, "who do His pleasure, hearkening to the voice of His word." They may not be essential to the management of the universe, but they form a much more interesting apparatus of management than the naked Spirit of God, quietly filling the solemn solitudes of immensity.

Chapter 27

PANTHEISM

WELL, where are we now?—I begin to feel that there is nothing for it but to accept the stupendous truth of God's existence. It seems inevitable.

It is unquestionably inevitable. There is no logical alternative. Stupendousness is before us whatever we may say to it. It is stupendousness of death or stupendousness of life; stupendousness of insanity or stupendousness of wisdom. You cannot hesitate as to which of the stupendousnesses it is. It is not the stupendousness of death, for the universe is alive throughout. It is not the stupendousness of mindlessness, for the universe bears the stamp of intelligence in every atom and fibre. You have but to introduce one more idea to complete the inevitable truth.

What is it?—The stupendousness is either a stupendous unity or a stupendous agglomeration of heterogeneous and unconnected parts. Which of

them it is cannot be in doubt for a moment where any ordinary knowledge of creation exists. The system is absolutely ONE. It is under a common government throughout, and is wheeling in one stupendous motion round a common centre. It is therefore a stupendous unity we have to deal with in contemplating the system of the universe.

But how does that bear on the conclusion?—Well, if you have a stupendous unity containing life and wisdom, you have God.

I don't know that I follow you there: that appears to me to be Pantheism.—No: Pantheism does not discriminate between God and the universe, which is the expression of God in the concretion of His wisdom and power. I do not point to a unified, living, wise universe as being God, but as declaring Him. The unity and the life and the wisdom are all in the universe, but they are not the attributes of the things forming the universe, but of a power underlying and outlasting the universe. This is plainly seen when we consider any element of the universe by itself. Take ourselves as the principal element for us: the life and the faculty we have are in us but not of us, but anterior to us. We are but of yesterday. A little way back, we were babes in the cradle: a step further back, we were nowhere. Yet the power by which we live and think existed, otherwise we never could have come to live and think. So with all animals, all plants, all minerals, and therefore of the entire globe, and every other body forming the universe: the powers they have and which they exemplified are but the incorporation of a Power preceding them. The powers they have and which they exemplify are in them, but they are not of them, but separable from and independent

of them. Can you not see the application of this to the stupendous unity of the living universe?

I would prefer you to define the application.—Well, here is a universe full of life, and wisdom and unity, and no part of that universe possesses these things as inherent attributes of its substance or form. Therefore there must be a wise and living unity underlying and antedating and separable from the whole. This wise and living unity is God. He stands there declared before us in the universe as it is. This is not Pantheism, which says: "Look at the universe and you look at God." The view I am presenting says: "Look at the universe and you look at the expression of God." There is a great practical difference between the two views.

What is the difference?—Well, you see the difference in the fact that Pantheism denies revelation and salvation, or their possibility, while the view I am presenting leaves the way open for both, and inductively involves them.

That may be a practical difference between the two theories; but why should there be such a difference? Why should Pantheism exclude revelation and salvation, and why should your view admit of them?—The reason is obvious. Pantheism, in teaching that the universe is God excludes the personal volition which is essential to revelation and salvation. There is no personal volition in the universe as such. A stone is a stone, and a planet is a planet. Both are governed by mechanical laws in which they are as helpless as a chip floating in the current. Man has volition, but it cannot act beyond the limited possibilities of his frail and perishable organization. In teaching that the universe is God, Pantheism gives us a God that cannot save: a huge

helpless blind machine—that can only work as we see it work, by mechanical law, without will, without speech, without the capacity of forming a purpose. But the view I am presenting discriminates between God and the universe. It points to the universe as proclaiming God, but as proving at the same time that God must be something separable and separate from the universe which He has contrived, and therefore capable of operating further than He has yet gone, if He see fit. It leaves the way for this thought, that as He has operated in the visible ways already before our eyes, He can operate in other ways:—that as He has given us one life, He can give us another; that as He has endowed us with the faculty of declaring thought by speech, He can Himself reveal His thoughts to us if He choose. Pantheism gives us the universe only and calls it God. The truth gives us the universe *plus* God, as the Power in which it subsists, of whose existence it recognizes the universe as proof. You must allow this is a great difference.

Yes. I must allow the greatness of the difference. —In the one case, we have a Father; in the other, we are but bubbles on a passive, dumb life-ocean which has no more capacity to take notice of us or care for us than the sea has for the fish that dart in its waters.

But might not a Pantheistic creation bring forth salvation by some process of Evolution in the same way as it is supposed to have brought forth the present order of life?—Salvation is the restoration, renovation, and glorification of the individual. If we are to be guided concerning the future by what we see in the order of Nature now, there is no ground for going so far as even a “might” in the direction of

your suggestion. Nature in itself is evidently incapable of purpose or deviation. It is barely conceivable that Nature, if the self-evolving system which Pantheism assumes, might some day, ages hence, develop a creature that would live so long as practically to be immortal; but this would not be salvation in the Bible sense. It would not be the resuscitation of lapsed lives in a better state for reasons operative in a previous state.

It would be something better than what is now.—Yes, it would, if—; but what a tremendous if. And even “if” it came, against which the chances on the spontaneous natural plane are billions to one, it would lack the fine elements of interest and joy that will come with previous history and character and desert of the Bible plan. The people would not be “saved” people, but merely an improved breed without character, title, or gratitude. But the fact is, there is no ground of hope at all in a Pantheistic universe—a mythical universe truly, for a universe without a moving force of intelligence and power is an impossibility.

In the other view, you think there is hope?—Unquestionably. A God separate from, though containing, the universe, has no bound to His power. He can do higher things than the universe yet shews. He can produce a higher life than we now possess. He can impart a higher knowledge than we can of ourselves acquire. It is all a question of whether He purposes so to do, and this to us, is a question of whether He has revealed Himself on the subject, and this is a question of history, and this is a question of no doubtful answer. The history of the Jewish nation and of the Christian religion, and the character of the Book which has come to us in connection with

both, constitute together the proof that God has revealed Himself with the delightful double result of explaining to us the cause of the evil that now prevails, and of imparting to us a rational hope of a day when life will be what we can now only imagine and desire in vain.

Chapter 28

WALKING BY FAITH

You probably begin to feel the comfort arising from the recognition of God as the foundation of the universe?—Perhaps I ought to feel in that way; I cannot say that I have got quite to that point yet.

You must not be discouraged. Subtle and remotely-fetched ideas are a long time in practically affecting the mind, but sooner or later, they produce their effects when once taken in and nourished.—I wish these ideas concerning God were not so “remotely-fetched” as you express it. They would have more weight with us if they were more proximate.

You mean if we could see them more easily?—Yes: if we could see the truth concerning God as easily as we see the light of day for example.

The day will come when that will be the case. It is a matter of promise that we shall then “know even as we are known,” and that “Heaven will be open.”

But our spiritual needs would require that now. What can we do with Heaven shut and darkness everywhere?—We can “walk by faith.”

That is not easy.—But it is possible, and even easy where faith is strong.

But what if faith is weak?—Well, is it an unhappy state.

I am afraid it is the state of most of us.—More so than need be, perhaps.

I don't know that we are responsible for it. If our faith is weak, it is weak. If our faith is strong, it is strong.—But there is an element in the case that you do not take into account there. Faith is not a fixed quantity like the colour of our hair, or the size of our bones. Faith is a result depending upon conditions that are under our control. In this respect, it is like health or education. We may at a given moment be helplessly unwell, or uneducated; but in so far as that state may be due to things done, or left undone by us, we may be responsible for our state and may have it in our power under due enlightenment to change our state.

I understand there is an organ in the brain that gives the power of faith? If so, its size and strength will determine our capacity for faith, I presume.—There is an organ in the brain that gives the mind the power of realizing things unseen, when the other faculties have decided upon evidence that they exist; but this power will not be developed apart from the action of those other faculties. It is absolutely true, and in strictest harmony with physiological science that “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom. x. 17). Faith will not come from the organ of wonder by itself; for the organ by itself is ignorant, and faith is the result of information.

I understood that faith was an affair of trust, apart from information.—It may be so in popular impression. It is not so in Bible usage, nor indeed in current intelligent practice. Intelligent people have faith in all sorts of things and persons, but never without a reason. They can tell you *why* they have faith, and their faith is none the less powerful or operative for resting on reason and not on sight. The farmer has faith in the depth of winter that summer will come again, and in the faith of harvest, he parts with actual grain stock which he uses as seed. He can give a reason for his faith, but still it is faith, and his faith is strong and affects his calculations and his actions, though relating to things not yet seen. So with a long-tried, perhaps absent, friend, who has given you a promise in some important matter of business: You have faith in his performance, though it is for the moment unseen, and this faith is based on knowledge of him. You could not exercise this faith apart from knowledge, neither could a farmer exercise faith enough to part with his seed-grain if he did not know by experience the stability of Nature's operations. Imperfect knowledge in either case would produce weak faith, and ignorance would prevent any faith at all.

Do you put faith in God on a level with these cases?—As regards its origin and operation, certainly. As Paul says: "Faith comes by hearing," and where faith is strong, action is in harmony with it by the inevitable law of cause and effect. As John says: "This the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;" and again, "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." On deepest reflection you will find this to be true—that a man entertaining the full persuasion

that Jesus was what he alleged, will get the better of a world that believes him not and disregards his commandments. He will keep himself unspotted from such a world by the sheer power of the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, and therefore lives, and is the future arbiter of human destiny. Such a faith is not a fantasy, but a conviction resting on knowledge.

The knowledge would be more solid and powerful if it rested on the sight of the eyes. The great defect of our present position with regard to God appears to me to rest here, that we see nothing. Creation seems such a vast silent vacuum so far as living intelligence is concerned. It seems as if God, who is everywhere present, ought to be everywhere visible, everywhere audible. Instead of this, He is everywhere inaccessible to eye or ear. It would certainly be a great simplification of our religious life if God would speak to us and shew Himself.—My good friend, we must humbly take things as they are. We are only created beings. God holds the universe in Himself. We may be quite sure that His relation to us is right, whatever our short-sighted feelings may suggest to the contrary.

I must, of course, agree to that. At the same time, you cannot mean that it is right that the world should be full of darkness with regard to God. And you cannot deny that the manifestation of God would be the most effectual way of dispelling the darkness.—You speak truly on both heads, but who is to decide the best method of bringing the world out of darkness into light? If I were suggesting that the present state of things on earth were a finality, there would be room for the dissatisfaction implied in your words: but you are aware that God Himself has

declared His purpose to bring about a complete change—so complete as to amount to “new heavens” and new earth.” His pledge could not be more solemn and precise: “As truly as I live, *all the earth shall be filled with the Glory of the Lord.*” “All shall know Me, from the least even to the greatest.” With this in view, it ought to be easy for you to believe that the method employed by God in effecting the transition is the right one, even if you cannot see it.

I must of course admit, as a reasonable man, that the ways of God must be right, though they may often necessarily appear inscrutable to our finite minds. Still, I cannot help the thought that with all power at His command, He might have taken the world into light without this terrible preliminary chapter of darkness.—It is a false thought, you may be sure. There are more elements in the problem than we are liable to realize. One of the principal elements lies here: the mental relations of those who are to be the subject of final good. Our own happiness depends upon these, and God’s happiness in us depends upon them also. We receive a free and unconstrained volition. Our destiny must be wrought out in harmony with the operation of this. Yet this free volition must be freely subordinated to the Will of God upon the intelligent discernment of our mutual relations as Creator and created. It is a very delicate problem, how to reconcile the power and supremacy of God with the independence of created intelligence, without which there would lack the chief joy of the perfect state. This is the problem which God is working out. It involves the permission of human rebellion, and the consequence and prevalence of evil for a time; the withdrawal

of God from the open manifestation which you desire, and the operation of faith in the development of those who are to please Him, and who, when a sufficient number of them are developed, are to enter into everlasting joy in the unveiled presence of God upon the earth. In fact, the conditions which you bewail are the very conditions of the process which Divine Wisdom is carrying on for His own glory and the salvation of the world.

It is a beautiful theory of the matter, and, I suppose, it must be true.

Chapter 29

THE PRESENT EVIL WORLD

I AM afraid you will think me an incorrigible. When I talk with you, I feel that faith must be the proper and the natural thing: but when I get away among people of another way of thinking, I seem to go back. And I go back so easily; almost like a weight that has been slowly lifted by a string, and suddenly the string snaps, I go straight to the earth.—Well, my good friend, we are unhappily situated in the present evil world in many ways: and one of the unhappy circumstances is that the world is full of heedless and unbelieving people by whom we can scarcely avoid being influenced. You must keep out of their way as much as possible. You know what Solomon says: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall fall.”

Ah, but we cannot go out of the world like that.—I do not mean that we are to go out of the world absolutely. We are obliged to mix more or less with the unbelieving people who form the world's

population. We live among them, and we live by them, and our mission as the servants of God is among them as Christ's was: but there are various ways of mixing with them. There is a way that is hurtful and a way that is harmless. There is a way that is forbidden and a way that is permitted. A wise man will seek the harmless and permitted way.

That is easily said. It may be difficult to carry out.—Granted the difficulty: the impossibility not granted.

I wish I knew just how to hit the medium.—Earnest endeavour and experience will help you. There are some natural distinctions which ought to yield guidance in the matter. There is a difference between doing business with people and keeping company with them. There is a difference between friendship and kindness. There is a difference between fellowship and acquaintance. There is a difference between courtesy and communion. We are forbidden to cultivate friendship with the world or to hold communion with them; but we are not forbidden, on the contrary, we are commanded to do them good, according to opportunity, and to be kind to the evil, and to be courteous to all men in word and deed.

Very well, suppose I try to keep up these distinctions, I still find myself powerfully influenced by what I see and hear.—Well, that is inevitable. We are bound to be impressed because we are impressible. This is inseparable from the conflict. It is part of the battle. There would be no battle without it. It is "blessed is the man that endureth temptation," not "blessed is the man that feels no temptation." What we have to do is to see to the re-inforcements, as in all war. Bring to bear the counterforce of truth and reason,

which will neutralize the effect of the falsehood and folly by which the world is influenced.

It sounds plausible, but it does not work out so easily as it sounds. The falsehood and the folly, as you call them, are wonderfully interesting.—Oh, my friend!

Well, I must speak the truth.

Truth? I grant it is truth in a certain relation, but not the supreme relation. It is true that “stolen waters are sweet.” What then? Are we to drink and find ourselves among the fools?—I do not advocate that. I only say that the world—this foolish, this evil world—(I grant it is all that)—is curiously attractive in the midst of its folly, and that I find it hard work to resist its fascination.

Well, well, the fascination granted, but it is only skin deep. It is not wrong to feel the fascination, but it is the part of wisdom to see through it and to resist it. This is part of the very “overcoming” of which Jesus speaks in every one of his seven “messages to the churches.” It would be no overcoming if the fascination were not felt.

It troubles me sometimes to think why there should be all this conflict in the attainment of the Divine ends with man. Why should not the process of righteousness be as easy and delightful and natural, say, as the impulse that makes the babe find its mother’s breast? Why this agonizing stress between opposing forces?—With that we need not trouble ourselves. It is facts we have to do with. We cannot enter into the Divine philosophy of things.

We seem to want to. It would be satisfactory if we could.—In a measure, we may, but the subject is too vast and subtle for our limited powers. We can only get an occasional glimpse.

I wish I could get glimpses.—It is easy to get glimpses.

I don't find it so.—See: life is a balance of forces: the whole universe is a balance of forces.

What am I to understand by a balance of forces? —Well, a combination of antagonistic forces so adjusted one to the other as to give the result in the case.

I don't know that I am quite clear.—Well, take a steam engine, for illustration: steam unconfined tends to instantaneous expansion in all directions. You confine it in tubes and chambers, which brings a counterforce into play, and this counterforce is so distributed and diversified by escapes and movements in the confining mechanism as to give you the motion aimed at by the mechanism as a whole. Various parts work in opposite directions. On a superficial view it might seem as if these oppositions were inconsistent with the object aimed at. On the contrary they are essential to it. The engine is a balance of forces: so is the whole universe: so is life physiologically; so is life mentally, which is at the apex of all phenomena.

How do you apply that to moral conflict?—Well, the excellence of moral victory, whether in its relation to a man's own happiness or the pleasure God finds in him, lies in the open-eyed and preferential choice of a right line of action, and the refusal of the wrong. Before this choice can be exercised as a mental habit and condition, there must be the counterforce or attraction which you spoke of as fascination in a wrong direction; and there must be opportunity for the play of this fascination before it can do its part. This opportunity requires the circumstances which we call temptation, and these circumstances involve all

the painful aspects of present experience to which you referred. There must be conflict before there can be victory, and there must be victory before there can be the high result—the ineffable result in which the whole process will end, when God will give eternal life to those who by a patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

I think I see your drift.

These problems continually descend on the path of man like the clouds of mist that come down on a foggy day. The best way is not to give them too much attention, but to accept our actual situation in a practical way, and overcome the evil with the good rather than speculate why evil is allowed so large a place.—I grant that would be the wise way, but there are many difficulties.

Chapter 30

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

THERE is one difficulty I strongly feel on the subject of God. It is practical more than the theoretical, and I daresay it has more to do with my own mental incapacity than with the subject itself. Still it is a real difficulty and sometimes even a distress to me.

What is it?—It is difficult to express. It has to do with realizing God. I can recognize supreme intelligence, both in creation and in the Bible; but I am baffled in every attempt to connect this intelligence with personality. I seem to glory in the wisdom of the universe without being able to love the Father as a Being. I do not know that you can catch my thought.

I catch it entirely. It is one that occurs in a more or less distinct form to every thinking mind.

It is connected with another phase of the subject which I often find myself busy with, *viz.*, the perfect passivity of Nature. Although everything is so wisely contrived, there is no sign of the participation of a living intelligence in their operations. Everything

works so mechanically, so regularly, by such fixed and unvarying law—that it is difficult to conceive of a personality having to do with the system in any way. It is exactly like machinery; and we know that machinery in no way depends upon the co-operation of personal intelligence external to itself, provided all its parts are perfect. I wish we had such tokens of God's relation to His works and superintendence of them, as we see in the case of a great factory and its proprietor. It is hard to believe in a Divine management of the world and in the Divine direction of our own lives, in the absence of every indication that would shew it.—I grant it would not only be hard: it would be impossible to conceive of the Divine relations of the universe if there were a total absence of indication of their existence.

Do you think you see indications?—I go further than that; the indications are demonstrations. Our very senses are compelled to surrender to them when they are fully displayed.

I am glad to hear you speak with such cheery confidence. I wish I could feel the same positiveness.—It is a question of mental sight. As the proverb goes, "Seeing is believing."

Mental sight is the difficulty.—True: but difficulties are sometimes artificial. Let us take the first of the two points you mentioned first: your recognition of intelligence, but inability to connect it with personality: your glorying in wisdom without being able to love the Father as a Being. Have you clearly formulated to your own mind what you mean by "intelligence" and "wisdom"?—I don't know that I have, beyond the idea of intelligence and wisdom characterizing the arrangement of things.

The terms imply the adaptation of means to ends,

do they not? And therefore the operation of intelligence in making the necessary adjustments.—They imply that the means are adapted to the ends; but I do not know that they just tell us how the adaptation has been made.

If they tell of intelligence, they must tell of one who is intelligent. How can you have intelligence without a being who is intelligent? The very first ingredient in the conception of intelligence is the existence of a being to possess the power or attribute of intelligence.—Yes, as a matter of words that seems so.

But is it not so as a matter of fact? Can intelligence exist apart from personality? (*Hesitates*)

You hesitate. What is intelligence? Is it not the discernment of the relation of things—the power to conceive, contemplate, and desire results, and the power to employ means to bring them about?—As applied to man, that is undoubtedly true.

But if that be the nature of intelligence, it must be true in its application to every order of being. There cannot be intelligence without a conscious personality to be intelligent? If you think there can, you must have a different idea of intelligence from what you have yet expressed, or, I may add, than you can express. Perhaps you will try again. Can you give any definition of intelligence that will exclude personality as its basis?—The quality of intelligence might exist in a made thing without personality residing in the thing.

It would not be intelligence, would it, but the stamp of intelligence? Could the intelligence exist in the thing without first existing in the maker? Besides in the real sense, there is no intelligence in the thing. A cleverly constructed toy, for example,

would not be intelligent, but the fruit of intelligence in its maker. An intelligent toy would be one that could exercise intelligence; could there be such a thing?—No, I suppose not.

An engine is a triumph of intelligent skill; but there is no intelligence in the engine. It is a mere adaptation of parts effected by intelligence outside of itself. Now if the universe shews, as you admit, the stamp of intelligence, must there not be an intelligent Being somewhere who has had to do with it?—But my difficulty is in applying the idea conveyed in the word “being” to God. When I speak of a being, I think of a creature of limited parts like man, or an animal of some sort. I cannot apply this idea to a being that holds all others.

No: you cannot apply *such* an idea of “being” to God; but there is nothing to debar the right idea from being applied. Being is existence. There are various kinds of existence, and all existence is real. Air is existence, water is existence, light is existence.

But you would not call God a Being in that sense?—Only in the sense that He exists as really as they. The difference is as to nature of existence. There is a first existence that lies at the root of all existence, and this is God; and it is a manifest necessity in His existence that there must appertain to Him that ability to contrive and execute wisely, of which we see the results in all other existences. Why should there be any hesitation in recognizing that intelligence in Him in which the whole universe is an expression; and how can you have intelligence without personality?

There is force in the way you put it; but the difficulty seems to remain.—The difficulty is purely the result of our own smallness and not of the subject itself. Man is an intelligent person. He might be

a person without intelligence, but he could not be intelligent without being a person. Why should we limit our ideas of intelligence and personality to a being so limited and weak as man? If these two attributes can be associated with a frail and corruptible organism such as he is, it ought to be an argument for a far higher association, instead of suggesting that they are limited to him. The unity of the stupendous universe involves the conclusion that it is the workmanship of a Supreme Person and though we more easily think of man than of God as a person, it is the mere result of our familiarity with man. It is not that "the glory of the incorruptible God" in any way naturally excludes it. In fact, if you remove personality from God, you obliterate God; for the essential idea of God as revealed (and necessitated by the constitution of Nature), is that of one supreme and all-wise, and all-powerful Person, out of whose irradiant energy, as the first substance, all things have been formed. When you feel the idea to be too great for realization, remember that it is the sensation of mortal weakness and limitedness, and not the necessary quality of the subject itself. The fact is there, whether we can carry it or not. Facts exist in themselves without reference to human capacity to march abreast of them. In this connection, one of the first achievements for man in a successful search for wisdom is to know that he is very small and weak, and that all his powers are derived from a Source which is eternal and self-subsisting.

It must be so; it must be so. You were to say a word on the other point, the absence of apparent participation on the part of God in the carrying on of creation.—We must reserve that to our next meeting.

Chapter 31

GOD'S FOOTPRINTS IN NATURE

You were next to speak of the relation of God to His works. You said you saw strong indications of His participation in the operations of the universe. This is what I wish to see above all.—Well, in what way could you expect to recognize them? You used the illustration of a great factory and its proprietor. You will, of course, admit that such an illustration could only apply in part. There is not the same connection between a factory and its proprietor, or even its actual builder, that there is between God and His works. A factory proprietor or builder does not use any part of himself in the putting-up of the place, nor does the machinery derive its motion from his personal energy in any sense. His intelligence has enabled him to put together things and conditions that act and re-act on each other; but he himself is altogether separate from and outside the fabric. He is not in it or it in him in the way that the universe

is *in* the Universal Power that has contrived and upholds it.

That is, of course, obvious, and constitutes a great difference.—It is a difference so great as to make illustration between the one and the other impossible. The tokens of God's relation to His works cannot be the same as the tokens of a man's relation to a factory he has built. Yet they are in a measure the same, and certainly not less palpable when fairly seen.

How would you define them?—Well, although the cases are not exactly the same, we may be helped by using the one to ascend to the other. How would you know that a particular factory that you had never seen before owed its existence to the contrivance and superintendence of a proprietor, but by this simple rule that factories do not make themselves, and that you see the owner take occasional part in its management?

That would be about the rule; but do you think the same rule holds good in the higher matters?—Undoubtedly.

It does not seem to me so.—The only difference is the greater size and range of the facts and the wider knowledge needed to perceive them. It is not so readily obvious that a world does not make itself and does not manage itself as that a factory does not make itself and manage itself; but it is as powerfully obvious when the eye takes in enough.

I should like to know how you make that out.—Well, from the small, reason to the great. Take the wing of a bird. Here is a contrivance for enabling a creature to rise in the air, and direct its course at will in that highly innavigable element—the one performance that man most desires, and is most unable to accomplish. The mechanism by

which the bird accomplishes this is the cleverest invention you can imagine. Man's contrivances are nothing in comparison with it. The make of the feathers, the stuff of which they are made, for lightness and compactness and toughness; the position in which they are inserted in the muscles of the wing; the relation between the nearly invisible nerves of the powerful muscles that enable the creature to move and twist and curve the feathers exactly in the ways required by the mechanical properties of the atmosphere, of which the bird knows nothing, all shew the most intelligent adjustments of intricate conditions to the necessities of a most difficult problem. It is not possible to conceive a more perfect evidence of the participation of contriving intelligence in adapting means to ends. A watch is nothing to it; a watch is a mere adjustment of parts to the requirements of mechanical impulse supplied by spring or pendulum. Here is a machine of life adjusted to the most difficult and most beautiful form of motion existing in the universe, and furnished with the most elaborate and minute appliances to that end. My proposition is, we have just the same reason for saying the bird did not make itself as for saying the factory did not make itself; and as man did not make it, the question presses—who?

Yes, but I don't quite see the conclusiveness of that. There is a great difference between the bird and the factory in one particular: the bird is a growth—the factory is not.

That is a great difference, doubtless; but it is a difference that only strengthens the argument as shewing the inconceivably superior methods of the intelligence that has produced the bird.—I fail to see that.

Well, as you say, the bird is a growth; but from what?—From an egg.

Have you considered what a wonderful fact that is—that from a mass of formless albumen in an egg, a perfect mechanical apparatus like a wing should be produced?—Yes, it is a wonderful fact; but the question is the origin of the fact.

To get at that, you must go back. The egg did not produce the bird by any wisdom the egg had—for it has none. Whatever bias and complication of invisible magnetic forces latent in it developed the organization of the bird, was derived from a previous bird. And the previous bird came from a previous egg, and that from a previous bird, and that from a previous egg, and so on in a long previous chain. That, of course, you will admit.—Certainly.

Well, you get to the time when the process began; for there was a time when there was no bird on the earth. The question would be; how was the start made, by egg or bird? You never knew a bird that did not come from an egg, and you never knew an egg that did not come from a bird. Yet here was a time when there was neither bird nor egg. Yet they came. One or other of them must have come first. Which ever it was, you are in the presence of a problem which you can only solve by admitting the interposition of contriving intelligence. For if it was an egg that came first, there was no bird to make it, and somebody else must have made it. If it made itself, it was such a thing as never happens now, for all eggs come from birds; and if it was a bird that came first, you have the same difficulty, only greater if possible, for a bird with all its complicated and finely-adjusted vital mechanism presents itself to the mind as a more difficult

thing to produce than a crusted mass of albumen. Yet no bird was ever known to come into being except by the hatching of an egg. Contriving intelligence must have been at the start of the bird, for it bears every mark of contrivance and evidence of super-human skill. If there was no contriving intelligence at work, then a more wonderful miracle than creation happened; for Nature produced a perfect piece of mechanism without the sense to do it, and never did the same thing again that we ever heard of.—You put it strongly, I confess.

It is only the strength of the logic of the case. And it is not the whole of the case. Whether it were egg or bird that were first, consider the wonderful fact that the thing was contrived to reproduce itself in endless succession. The bird or the egg received a constitution which enabled it automatically to leave egg or bird of precisely the same sort. It would have been a stupendous feat of wisdom to produce a living bird, but think of making a bird that could produce eggs that would produce birds of the same sort! People are so familiar with the phenomenon that its extraordinary character, in most cases, fails to strike them. A man who produces a new machine of any kind that can do fine and useful work is considered a genius; but where is the man that can invent a machine that will make machines of its own sort without making it necessary for him to trouble himself again. And suppose a man could make such a machine, what would he think of the people who should say that because his machines went on making each other, therefore he did not make the first one that started the thing?—The idea is amusing.

Yet it is what has happened with the works of God. Because He has developed Nature on a self-working

principle, some people say, and many people think, He did not start Nature. The case of the bird and the egg is only one case. There are thousands like it, and I claim that they all yield as complete an indication of the participation of a contriving intelligence as the existence of a factory proves a builder and proprietor.—Perhaps you are right; but there is this other difference which you have not touched. The factory owner takes open part in the management, whereas in Nature, at all events so far as we see in our day, there is no evidence of the directing hand of Nature's Proprietor.

I was coming to that; but we must leave that for another time.

Chapter 32

THE DESIGN ARGUMENT AND MAN'S AVERSION TO GOD

You spoke last time of the footprints of God in the universe or the evidences of contrivance in Nature. I confess I expected something stronger in the way of shewing a Divine presence and participation in the works of creation.—You have a powerful appetite for truth.

A hungry man must have proper food.—I think I placed the right article before you, so far as we have got. I shewed you evidence of the participation of contriving intelligence in the original production of the visible objects of Nature. This is equivalent to demonstrating the existence of a Being possessing this intelligence.

What you said goes no further than what is called the Design argument which is generally given up now, I think.—As regards what is generally given up or generally held, we need attach no weight to that. Nothing is more unreliable than what is called the “consensus of public opinion.” It is a mere current

set up by the bold suggestions of one or two minds a little more original than the mass of mediocrities of which the population consists.

But the surrender of the Design argument is not a mere consensus of loose opinion. It is a concession to reason.—I do not admit that.

It proves too much, does it not?—In what way?

It would prove a designer for God.—By no means. Since something must have been undesigned, that something must be self-existent, and possess power and wisdom equal to the creation of everything else.

But then the argument comes back: if God could exist without a designer, why not these other things so vastly inferior?—But the door is shut against the argument coming back in that way. As a matter of abstract thought, there might be such a rejoinder, but the facts exclude it. The things that constitute creation are manifestly not self-existent. They are caused. There was a time when they existed not. There must be a power behind them to produce them; for it is one of the established axioms of science that no effect is without an adequate cause. I claim that the million visible effects in creation, so vast and so harmonious as a whole, are actual demonstrations of the existence of the Invisible Creator; for otherwise their existence is unaccounted for. This, you may perceive, is the very argument of the apostle Paul in Romans that “The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”

You do not agree to the surrender of the Design argument then?—By no means. The leaders of scientific thought themselves have not given it up, though not insisting upon it. The disciples have

outrun their masters altogether. Darwin said he did not know what to think finally on the subject; sometimes he thought there must be a Designer, and sometimes he thought not. Tyndal says he has often asked himself, in the presence of the multitudinous manifestations of wisdom in Nature, whether there was not a Being that knew far more about these things than limited man. Even Huxley says something to the effect that a man would be a fool to deny the possibility of miracle. If, therefore, the highest intellects of the unbelieving party are in a state of indecision, we need not trouble ourselves with the *ipse dixit* of the mass of shallow smartness that passes current for "the scientific world."

You take strong ground.—Not a bit stronger than the facts justify. The Design argument, with the qualifications arising from the difference between human methods and the methods of eternal power in Nature, is the argument of common sense, which fits the necessities of the problem in all its wide ranges. That it should have been so readily surrendered only illustrates the tendency of the human mind, of which Paul speaks, to get away from God. It is not a needless warning he gives when he says: "Beware lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

That is one thing that I must say I cannot quite understand—why it should be represented as a natural disposition with man to depart from God?—It is represented so because the fact is so.

I have a difficulty in seeing that the fact is so. It seems to me that it is as natural for the intellect of man to receive one truth as another.—It is an amiable thought, but no more.

You are severe.—I hope not. It is the severity of

coercive truth—I mean truth coercing my own mind. I was once prone to the pleasing views that commend themselves more or less, to all thoughtful minds in youth; but a widening experience and enlarging enlightenment have compelled me to let them all go, and to recognize that the Bible representation is accurate on all points, and on none more than this, that the natural bias of the human mind is opposed to God.

Why should the bias be a *natural* bias? This is what I cannot understand: would not the Creator of the bias, in that case be responsible?—A smart suggestion, but look deeper. Whence does the bias arise? Is it an implanted instinct or is it the abnormal play of mental forces, which are good in their right application? The latter undoubtedly. Man is naturally ignorant of everything. When he comes into the world, his brain is like a clean sheet, on which nothing has been written. It is not only God that he knows nothing of, but he knows nothing of man or the earth or any natural object. Ignorance is his natural state. All knowledge is outside of him, and only gets in by being put in. Left to himself he would not put it in; as you see in children, who, if they had their own way, would run wild on the streets and grow up barbarians. He is naturally impatient of nothing so much as law. The restraints of school and discipline have to be enforced; and it is only in a few cases that these are successfully applied—that is, applied with the result of producing a true mental culture. The bias against God is part of the natural working of his mental machinery. He prefers that which is easy and that which he likes, and that which he can see. Knowledge of anything that is unseen is irksome to him, and the denial of his natural

likes, still more so. God as the unseen Power and as the Commander of obedience and the Enjoiner of holiness, is not congenial to his natural desire for independence and liberty to follow his likes without restraint. "Departure from the living God" is therefore a danger to which his natural feelings incline him.

But my difficulty is, why he should not have been created on a principle that would have excluded this danger.—My friend, any difficulty that sits in judgment on Divine methods must be founded on mistake. Is it possible that a thing made can have any right to say to its Maker, "Why hast thou made me thus?"

I must, of course, admit the impropriety of such a thing. Still, with the powers of reflection which we have, such thoughts will occur.—The point is, to keep the powers of reflection in subordination to the manifest requirements of reason. It cannot be that there is any mistake in the method of our creation. There may be some things we cannot readily understand, but we may be sure that they are capable of explanation from the point of view of the Divine plan in its entirety.

My desire is to see the explanation.—It is those who seek for wisdom, as a rule, that get it.

Can you suggest a reason for man's liability to go wrong?—There are two facts or phases of the case that must be carefully kept in view in getting an answer. The first refers to the present state of man. The custom of human thought is to assume that the present state is man's normal or natural state. If this were true, it would be as natural for man to go right as it is for a fish to be a fish, or an elephant an elephant, or any other thing after its kind. But the fact

disclosed by revelation is that man's present state is an abnormal state; that, because of revolt, he is separated from God for whom he was made, and under the deranging effects of the Divine blessing reversed, which explains why man, the highest of earth creatures, should be the greatest failure among them all, and why, with such latent capacities for wisdom and goodness, he should in the mass of his race develop in the contrary direction. Apart from this, there is no explanation of an undoubted fact.

You seemed to refer to a second fact.—Well, yes; but it is rather more difficult to put into shape. It is the fact of man's natural ignorance. We might assume that in producing a creature after His own image and likeness, God would make knowledge, rather than ignorance, the natural and inherent state of man. That He has not done so we may take as proof that the problem of how to produce a creature that should be a "free agent" and that should combine with capacity for knowledge the power to enjoy the process of its acquisition, required that the basis or raw material of his being should be such a mental organization as should possess the capability to receive knowledge without actual knowledge itself. If so, the bestowal of such an organization would involve the liability to its non-use or its wrong use, and would therefore leave the door open for the evil that has come.

Surely it was in God's power to shut the door against evil?—In a sense that may be conceded: but what if evil was necessary for the educing of the highest good?

There you surprise me.—We cannot judge of the work of God till it is finished. The finish exhibited in the Apocalypse is this: "No more curse, no more

pain, no more death: all tears dried: the former things passed away." We must keep this steadily in view in judging of the mission of the evil that is now so sorely upon the earth. It cannot be when the finish is reached that there can be any difficulty with regard to an evil that shall have passed as entirely away as a disturbed dream. No transient evil can be too great that is essential to the process of reaching such unmixed good.

But it is the use of evil at all that is my difficulty. —It need not be a difficulty. Even if we could not see the part it contributes, the fact of its employment would be sufficient for docile intelligence to allow its place in the works of Omnipotence. Evil whets the appreciation of good. Sorrow paves the way for gladness. Sin and death reveal the greatness and holiness of God, and afford scope for the illustration of His kindness. The very darkness is the necessary background for light, and gives the blue sky where there would be blinding glare. Everything is right in its own place.

Chapter 33

THE FACT OF REVELATION

You have not quite made out the case on the second point of the factory illustration.—Let me see: that was as regards the visible participation of the builder?

Yes. You have shewn that the marks of intelligence in the construction of the universe carry a powerful inference of the existence of a constructor; but you have not shewn anything parallel to the visible participation of a factory builder.—I think I referred to something of this kind in a former case. The “visible participation” is really the strongest point in the argument. The evidence is that God has visibly participated in the management of the world to which we belong.

I should like to see that evidence.—It is the full, effectual, and final settlement of the most important controversy that can engage a man’s thoughts. By other lines of argument, we merely approximate to an answer; by this we stand in its presence. We may reason plausibly from the organization of Nature, but there is no absolute conclusiveness to our

reasoning; we can never reach absolutely firm ground. We see the evidence of wisdom, but never can find out the source of it. With the evidence of revelation, we get to the very kernel of the subject.

Oh, it is revelation you refer to?—Certainly; what else could it be? God's visible participation in the affairs of man must take the form of revelation.

Oh, but there is a slight fog there. Revelation, as I take it, is not the same thing as visible participation. Revelation may be a perfectly invisible thing, as in the case of a message to a prophet by inspiration. Visible participation would not be invisible.—There is a distinction there, no doubt. But still the sense in which I use the phrase "visible participation" would cover all. A man would visibly participate in your affairs, who wrote to you a letter from Australia, although you might never see him. My proposition is that the evidence proves that God has revealed His existence by actually participating in human affairs, both by invisible message and visible action—and that we have just the same ground for believing in Him as we have for believing in the existence of a factory builder who sometimes appears at the factory and gives orders to the workmen, and sometimes sends them instructions through the post.

That would be a very satisfactory state of things.—It is the actual state of things.

Would you briefly indicate the evidence of it?—Well, take the opening statement of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "God, who at sundry times and divers manners, *spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets*, hath in these last days *spoken unto us by a Son*." This single statement, I submit, when worked out in all its elements, will afford a body of evidence that is complete and conclusive.

I cannot see how you make that out. To me, the statement is simply so many words strung together.

My friend, it is much more than that if you consider. It is a very old stringing of words together. It is a stringing of words together that has a history. It is a stringing of words together performed by some one. There is not a letter, book or document under the sun but consists of so many words strung together: yet each letter, book or document is by itself much more than that. The words strung together convey a meaning, and they were strung together by particular men for particular reasons. You would not deny that, would you?—Well no, of course.

Would you call the works of Shakespeare in modern times, or the poetry of Homer in the Greek age, “simply so many words strung together”?—They are literary productions, of course.

They are words strung together, but they are much more. They are an arrangement with a history, and their very arrangement affords evidence of facts outside themselves.—I don’t know that I understand you there.

Do you not think that the “words strung together” by the Latin and Greek authors afford evidence of the existence of those authors, though the plays and poems and histories they wrote in many cases do not mention them?—That, of course, is never questioned.

Very well; here is the past existence of certain men proved by the present existence of what you call “simply so many words strung together.” And not only the existence of men: have you any doubt of the existence of Sparta 2,500 years ago and her sister republics in the heroic age of Greece?—Of course not.

Have you any doubt of the extraordinary ascendancy of Roman military prowess for centuries in all parts of the civilized world?—Of course not.

How come you to know of these but by what you call “simply so many words strung together”?—Oh, you are pressing that point too strongly.

I wish you to see that “words strung together” in the form of ancient works may carry with them powerful evidence of many things outside themselves.—That, of course, I grant; but I fail to see how you apply it to the words you have quoted from Hebrews.

Well, these words, which are 1,800 years old, affirm a thing which, if true, amount to evidence that God has revealed Himself.—Ah, “if true!” That is the whole pith of the question.

I grant it, and I assert that an investigation of the matter will lead to the conclusion, on the strictest logical lines, that it is and can be nothing else than true.—You are so very positive.

It is a merit to be positive when the matter is important and the facts warrant it.—The matter is certainly important; but I do not see why you are so positive.

Well, it is something to bring into clear relief this simple idea, that *you must prove the statement of Hebrews i. 1 to be false before you can get rid of the evidence that God has revealed Himself.*—I think the onus of the proof lies with you.

Perhaps so, according to the technical rules of evidence; but so far as moral weight goes, it is something for the unbeliever or the doubter to ponder, that this 1,800-year old statement, so full of majesty and light, remains calmly in existence with all the possibility and probability that it is a statement of

truth, and with all the certainty that he cannot, by any candid and thorough mode of treatment, disprove it in the least.—But I am not an unbeliever, nor can I say that in the proper sense I am a doubter. I am merely putting your position to the proof. I say you are bound to prove the truth of the statement in Hebrews before you can produce it as evidence.

Well, I think that is easily done. Do you admit that the epistle, of which it is the opening statement, was written in the first century?—I am bound to admit that much.

Do you admit it was written by the Apostle Paul?—I am not so clear as to that. There is a strong opinion it was written by Barnabas.

Yes; well that does not go for much. The existence of such an opinion is due to the anonymous character of the epistle. When a work is anonymous, there is always room for question as to the authorship. There were early guesses on the subject: and these guesses have come down to our age, and are favoured by that class of mind that delight in unhingements and uncertainties. But the broader stream of tradition and reputation attributes the letter to Paul, and this reputation is confirmed by the style and construction of the epistle. There is no real doubt that it was written by him.—There is real doubt on the part of some.

Well, it matters little, because the authorship of Barnabas would have an equal value in view of the companionship of Barnabas with Paul in Paul's work and knowledge; and in view of the inspiration common to all the apostles and their fellow labourers. Admitting the first-century authorship of Hebrews, whether by Paul or Barnabas, I shall hope at our next interview to make it clear to you that we possess in it

evidence of the stupendous fact that the Eternal Being, Whose footprints are everywhere visible in the universe, has manifested Himself to mortal man, and spoken to him in communications of unutterable value both for his present well-being and his future life.

Chapter 34

THE EVIDENCE OF GOD HAVING SPOKEN

I AM curious to see how you are going to extract from the epistle to the Hebrews, evidence of God having manifested Himself.—There is nothing simpler. The writer alleges that God, who had spoken in ages previous to that in which he was writing, had again spoken in those very days—days which he speaks of as “these last days”—the last days of the Mosaic system of things.

Well, that is an assertion: assertion is no proof.—It depends upon the nature of the assertion and who makes it. The assertion of a man who knows is accepted in our courts every day as proof. Suppose it is a question as to the signature of a certain document: the man who signed it knows that he signed it, and his assertion would be taken as proof against the testimony of many witnesses who might declare it their opinion that it was not his signature.

But the case of God having spoken is not a case of that sort.—Not exactly; but it comes much nearer

than you might imagine. It is a case of personal knowledge in those who testify in the case.

I can scarcely see that. A man signing a document is an act that can be seen and spoken to in a manner clear from all doubt; but the speaking of God, with all reverence, must necessarily be a complex and even nebulous operation, to which a man cannot speak in the clear and simple way in which he speaks to the signing of a document.—It depends upon which form of operation you may be referring to. The statement before us is that the speaking took place “at sundry times and in divers manners.” When the various manners are taken into account I think you will find that there is no ground for your reservation. Let us take the case that was within the writer’s knowledge: “Hath in these last days spoken unto us *by His Son.*” Here it is the case of Christ that was before the writer’s mind. Would you call the life of Christ a complex and nebulous operation?—Nothing could be more simpler, definite, or tangible.

Are you quite sure about that?—Can there be any doubt about it?

It has been the subject of a great diversity of opinion.—Yes, the meaning of the operation may be the subject of great diversity of opinion; but the reality of the operation is not called into question.

I am not sure you can go so far as that.—What! Is there any doubt as to the fact of his having been crucified, to commence with?

Some have even doubted that.—Oh, my friend, some doubt their own existence, or, at least the existence of all outside of themselves. You would not bring such metaphysical vagaries to bear on the settlement of a disputed account or the terms of a business agreement. “Some” are to be found on the

side of every craze and every possible hallucination; but you do not allow this to prevent you from perceiving and acting upon manifest truth?

Well, I mean to say that some have even doubted whether Christ was an historic character at all.

Do you doubt it?—I do not say that I do. Of course, I cannot.

Very well, why trouble about the others? If there is one thing that all the world is agreed about, whatever their creed or complexion—Jew or Gentile, atheist or believer, Protestant or Papist—it is that Jesus was crucified in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar by Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea. Now, if Christ was crucified, Christ was a real man, and there was some real reason connected with his career as a man that led his enemies to seize and crucify him—a reason, I mean, that influenced those enemies. Men are never taken into custody and executed without their doing or saying something that makes a deep impression.—That must be granted of course.

Very well. What was it in Christ that excited the animosity of those who brought about his death? Was it not what he said and what he did?—Well!

Do you know what he said and what he did?—Of course, if we take what is written in the gospels, we know all about it.

Do you refuse to take what is written in the gospels?—Well, no, I cannot say that I refuse.

Do you accept what is written in the gospels?—There you press me too closely.

You must either accept or reject?—Not necessarily. A man might be unable to do either. He might not be sure how the case stands.

Is that your case?—I don't know that I know what my case is.

Do you think the state of the evidence is of that uncertain character as to render it impossible for a man to come to a decision.—Sometimes I think so, and sometimes I think it is quite clear.

On which side?—I mean clear on the side of the truth.

Then your hesitancy is between “yes” and “not sure”?—That is about it.

You have not found yourself hesitating between “no” and “not sure”?—Well, no. I think it impossible to take the negative attitude. I must say the nature of the case excludes the idea of deception or imposture. I frankly admit that the New Testament cannot be a work of fiction. The tone of the book excludes the possibility of its being such. Any one of Paul’s letters is conclusive on that head. It is evident to any man of discernment that the writers were men of intense moral earnestness, and wrote what they believed to be true.

Very well; why should there be any hesitation about the matter? Men who could write the New Testament must have been able to know whether the things they testified were true or not; and if, as you admit, they were convinced of the truth of what they wrote about, why hesitate to accept their conviction as evidence of the truth of it?—Ah, well, you see, there is always the possibility of men being honestly persuaded of a thing that is not exactly correct in the way they take it.

Now, my friend, that is altogether too vague. I must bring you to the point. Do you really find in your everyday dealings with men that they are liable to be persuaded of the reality of thing that do not exist.—Well, yes; there are Catholics, and Spiritualists, and the Swedenborgians: they are all

very earnest in their opinions about the things that I believe you regard as delusions.

Ah, but that has reference to matters of opinion. I am not speaking about matters of opinion. Men are liable to differ in their opinions of things they have no personal knowledge of. But they do not differ as to matters of sight and experience?

Some think they see things and persons in visions and seances and what not.—I am not speaking of things out of the way, but of ordinary sight and experience. For example: We have a railway station and trains that come and go at certain hours. There is no difference of opinion among the townspeople as to where the station is, or as to what hours the trains run. Whatever their capacity or temperament or calling or bias, they are all agreed as to these matters. You never find any one taking it into his head that New Street Station is at Selly Oak, or Snow Hill Station at Smethwick. And then among the thousands of people that swarm the streets among cabs, drays, carts, buses, trams, etc., you find absolute unity of impression and discernment as to the facts of the moment. If a horse falls, all who see it are aware of it and take it correctly; no one supposes it is a house that has fallen; or that it has fallen up to the sky. And if no horse falls, no one imagines the incident occurring. If nothing happens, everybody in the street is of one mind—that nothing has happened. And so in getting out of the way of vehicles at street crossings, everybody gets out of the way at the right moment. You don't find people imagining there is a cab going past when it isn't; and when the cab is there, you don't find anyone supposing it is not there. And so with a thousand things that might be mentioned.

You are needlessly minute, are you not ?

I am seeking to emphasize the idea that in matters of sense, it is the commonest thing in the world for people to see correctly, and a most uncommon thing for people to imagine something to be happening that is not happening. The application lies here : the New Testament records a great many open-air everyday occurrences in connection with Christ—things that people in ordinary do not make mistakes about. The record was written by men who saw these things, and who, you admit, were men of earnest purpose and honest mind. I cannot, therefore, admit that you are reasonable in not frankly “taking what is written in the gospels.” If the writers were honest men, they wrote truthfully; and if they say they saw Christ walk on the water, you cannot hesitate to accept their testimony, unless you say you have evidence that they were deranged. Are you prepared to say the apostles were mad ?—No.

Do you say they were bad ?—No.

Then you are bound to receive their testimony as to those things that excited the animosity of the authorities against Christ, and led to his crucifixion. I shall ask you another time to look at those things, and to see in them that undoubted manifestation and interposition of the Divine intelligence and power of which you desire to be convinced.

Chapter 35

THE WORKS OF CHRIST

WHAT we are to fix our minds on now is the cause of the enmity that led the Jewish authorities to demand the crucifixion of Jesus. In this we shall find the promised evidence of God having spoken. We get at the marrow of the matter by recalling the words of Christ's accusers on the occasion of their deciding to hand him over to Pilate, and also when standing before that functionary. The high priest had asked him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" and Jesus had said, "*I am*, and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest rent him clothes and said, "Ye have heard of his blasphemy. . . . We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, *because he made himself the Son of God*" (Mark xiv. 61-63; John xix. 7).—I do not see what that has to do with the matter.

We shall see presently. Meanwhile, have it

distinctly in mind that Christ claimed to be the Son of God. The fact does not rest on what he said before his accusers. It was a prominent feature of his early teaching. "I proceeded forth and came from God, neither came I of myself, but He sent me. . . . I am from above. . . . I am not of this world, . . . I do nothing of myself, but, as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And He that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him. . . . I speak to the world those things that I have heard of Him."—No doubt Christ claimed to be the Son of God; but what use do you make of the circumstance?

We have, then, to consider whether the claim is a true one; because, if it is so, we have in Christ the whole answer to the question of whether God has spoken.—No doubt, *if*—

I submit there is no "if" about it when the whole case is before us. Christ not merely claimed: he *proved*.—That is what I want to see.

He was careful to distinguish between mere claim and the demonstration which established the claim.—I don't know that I was aware of that.

He said: "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do *bear witness* of me that the Father hath sent me. . . . *If I do not the works of my Father*, believe me not, but if I do, *though ye believe not me*, believe the works." You see he appeals to the "works" as evidence of his claims. He even went further and said, "If I had not done among them the *works which none other man did*, they had not had sin." Now upon this, these two questions arise. What were "the works" on which he relied in proof of his claim that he was the Son of God? and, Were they of a character that

could be accounted for on any other principle than the truth of that claim? Now, I should like you to answer these questions. You must know enough of the facts of the case to enable you to do so.—I am afraid I do not know so much as you give me credit for.

Any Sunday scholar knows what Christ did.—You refer to the miracles, I suppose?

I refer to the things that Christ did. They are truly described as “miracles”; but then you will do yourself an injustice if you huddle them up in a single term which the refinements of speculative metaphysics have brought into discredit as a questionable matter. The works of Christ will fail to impress your mind as it ought to be impressed if you merely refer to them under a technical term.—You mean we should go into detail.

Well, consider what the works were in themselves as bearing on the momentous question of whether Divine power was manifest in their performance. This mode of considering them is more likely to lead you to endorse heartily the utterance of Nicodemus in his midnight conversation with Jesus, than the modern flippant scholastic mode of referring to them in the lump as “the miracles”—a reference which is generally the corollary of their dismissal.—What did Nicodemus say? I forget.

He said, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for *no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him.*”—That is tolerably to the point.

It is where docile reason is bound at last to come.—I wish to be found with docile reason.

Then come and listen to Christ on one of the most interesting occasions of his life, *viz.*, when he

answered the almost despairing appeal to John the Baptist—when John, from the seclusion of his prison, had sent two disciples to ascertain (in the delay that was taking place) whether Jesus were the Messiah or not: “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” We are informed that in the same hour he (Jesus) cured many of their infirmities and plagues and of evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus, answering, said unto them (John’s disciples), “Go your way and tell John *what things ye have SEEN and HEARD, how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the DEAD are RAISED.*” Can you account for these performances on any other principle than the one acknowledged by Nicodemus, *viz.*, that the man performing them must have God in co-operation with him?—They were wonderful performances.

Were they not Divine?—Many men have shewn wonderful curative power in various ages of the world.

Did you ever hear of a man before or since who could cure leprosy with a word, or raise the dead?—I don’t know that I ever did.

Are you prepared to concede the power of God as the explanation?—I only wish to be quite sure they were not feats of superior naturalism.

Did you ever know of superior naturalism raising the dead?—No; only there is always the possibility of there having been only suspended animation in these cases.

What have you to say to walking on the water, then?—That seems stronger, I confess, if the narrative is reliable.

We have already settled that; and what about

stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and feeding five thousand persons with a few loaves of bread.—That, I must say, defies explaining away, if we are to receive it as a fact.

You cannot escape it. You have admitted that the writers wrote from personal knowledge; that they were men of truth and probity, and that they were capable of judging the sight of their eyes. If so, these things were done by Jesus. Are you prepared to go away from that?—I do not see how I can.

The case is placed finally beyond reach of cavil or doubt by Christ's own resurrection. If the evidence of Divine co-operation rested wholly on what he did during his lifetime, there would always be the possible haunting thought that his extraordinary powers were due to some exceptional human endowment, not necessarily carrying evidence of Divinity. But what can be said in the presence of his own resurrection? Is it within the bounds of conceivable possibility that a dead man should raise himself?—I am, of course, bound to acknowledge that if Jesus *really* rose from the dead, the case is settled beyond the reach of doubt.

My friend, you speak doubtfully of the absence of doubt. You say "if" Jesus rose. Do you think the state of the evidence admits of a doubt? If there is one proposition of historical fact established more firmly than any other by the rules of evidence, as universally received, it is the one that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead the third day after his crucifixion, and remained on earth in living association with his friends for six weeks afterwards.—Perhaps I am not so well acquainted with the evidence as I ought to be.

I may ask you to look at it next time we meet,

along with other evidence of the truth of the fact alleged by Paul that "God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, and did in the last days (of Judah's Commonwealth) speak to the contemporary generation by His Son."

Chapter 36

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Good morning; I expect this will be our last meeting.
—I am sorry to hear you say so.

All things human come to an end, and circumstances have arisen that will prevent our meeting again.—I am so sorry.

I am anxious, under the circumstances, to place before you in as strong form as I can the evidence we possess of the fact of Christ having risen from the dead after his crucifixion by Pilate. I presume you will admit that if this fact can be proved, there is an end to all doubt on the subject of God having spoken?—My dear friend, certainly. I am ashamed of having so long appeared to hold back from the admission. If I have seemed something more than a doubting Thomas, it has been to draw you out in the hope of eliciting the evidence I crave in my inmost heart of the most stupendous truth affecting us as men.

I have not been unconscious of your desire to be

convinced, as I may express it; and I have not been averse to the grounds of conviction being put to the fullest test.—I believe I only require to be certain about a truth in order to receive it.

If I did not believe that to be the case, I would not have taken the pains I have put forth to combat your objections.—My objections, I think, are nearly all gone. But I should like to hear what the evidence is that you think so strong of the resurrection of Christ.

It is the testimony of eye-witnesses.—You refer to the New Testament?

Yes. In the documents composing the New Testament we have the testimony of the apostles to the fact of Christ's resurrection, as actual as if it came really from the lips of the writers in our presence. It is the testimony of eye-witnesses—not of men who merely believed; and it is the testimony of men who were particular to put forward the fact that they were eye-witnesses; that they spoke from personal knowledge, and not from hearsay. People in general have no idea how prominent this feature is. Pardon me if I illustrate it somewhat particularly.—I shall be most pleased to follow you.

Peter, one of the leading witnesses in the case, says:—“*We have not followed cunningly-devised fables*, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were EYE-WITNESSES of his majesty” (2 Pet. i. 16). And again in a speech: “*This Jesus God hath raised up, WHEREOF WE ALL ARE WITNESSES*” (Acts ii. 32). “*Him God hath raised from the dead, WHEREOF WE ARE WITNESSES*” (Acts iii. 15). “*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be*

a Prince and a Saviour. . . . We are HIS WITNESSES of *these things*" (Acts v. 30-32). "We cannot but speak the things which we have SEEN AND HEARD" (Acts iv. 20). "To whom (his disciples) Christ shewed himself ALIVE after his sufferings, by many infallible proofs *being seen of them forty days*" (Acts i. 3). "We (Peter and the rest of the apostles) are WITNESSES of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem, whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day and shewed him openly, not unto all the people, but unto WITNESSES chosen before of God, even to us, WHO DID EAT AND DRINK WITH HIM *after he rose from the dead*" (Acts x. 39-41).

These are casual allusions. Is there no formal narrative of the resurrection of Christ in what are called the gospels?—Certainly. Take the account by Matthew, one of the twelve disciples. The particulars are fully set out in the 28th chapter. Mark's account you will find in chapter xvi. Luke supplies the most striking incident in the whole episode (chapter xxiv. 13-35). John's account has touching features peculiar to itself (see chapter xx.). These narratives of themselves prove the case: but the case does not wholly stand on them.—I was under the impression that the evidence was confined to the Gospels.

Not so. Paul, in 1 Cor. xv. after citing the evidence of Peter, the twelve, and sundry others, says, "Last of all, HE WAS SEEN OF ME, ALSO." In another part of the epistle he asks, "Have I not SEEN Jesus Christ, our Lord"? (1 Cor. ix. 1). In his speech in the synagogue of Antioch, he expressly says: "*God raised him from the dead*, and HE WAS SEEN MANY DAYS of them which came up with him from Galilee

to Jerusalem, who are his *witnesses* to the people" (Acts xiii. 30, 31). Paul finally found himself in custody in consequence of the agitation caused by his testimony to the resurrection of Christ. When so in custody, Festus, the Roman governor of one of the Syrian provinces, had occasion to state Paul's case to King Agrippa. His statement lays hold of this very feature. He says, "Against whom (Paul), when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed, but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one, Jesus, *which was dead*, WHOM PAUL AFFIRMED TO BE ALIVE" (Acts xxv. 18, 19). There is another very large and fruitful department of evidence consisting of the casual allusions and declarations throughout the letters of the Apostle Paul. The resurrection of Christ crops up throughout these letters, as a matter he takes for granted in the most natural way: "*Now is Christ risen from the dead*, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. xv. 20). This is his postulate in arguing with the Corinthians as to the truth, or otherwise, of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The ground of this postulation is as strong as it could be: "*I have seen him*" (verse 8). Then he speaks of Christ who "*died for them and rose again*" (2 Cor. v. 15; of believing on "*him who raised up Jesus from the dead*" (Rom. iv. 24). He states that Christ "*was raised again* for our justification" (verse 25). In chapter vi. 4, he says, "*Christ was raised up from the dead* by the glory of the Father;" speaks of Christ as "*him who is raised from the dead*" (vii. 4); refers to "*the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead*" (viii. 11), and of God as "*He that raised up Christ from the dead*" (*ibid.*). In 1 Cor. vi. 14, he plainly says, "*God hath*

both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power." In 1 Cor. xv. 15, he says, "We have testified of God that *He raised up Christ*;" in 2 Cor. iv. 14, "He that *raised up the Lord Jesus*;" Eph. i. 20, "God *raised him from the dead*," and gave him glory; 2 Tim. ii. 8, "Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, *was raised from the dead*;" 1 Thess. iv. 14, "Jesus died, *and rose again*;" Rom. xiv. 9, "Christ both *died and rose*, and revived." I might also quote from the epistles of John in the same way; also of Peter, also from the Apocalypse, where there is the unusually distinct exhibition of Christ as "He who was dead and is alive," and who being alive is coming again. Could the testimony be stronger?—I don't know that it could, as a matter of words.

In what other way could it be stronger?—It would have been open to test had the witnesses been alive.

What test could you have applied?—It is impossible to say just on the spur of the moment.

To what could your tests have been directed?—I cannot exactly say.

Must they not necessarily have been directed to two points—the capability of the witnesses to give evidence, and their trustworthiness in a moral sense?—Doubtless these would be leading points.

If a man is able and honest, you would accept his evidence?—Well, I suppose most of us would.

The general incidents attendant on the first blush of the resurrection of Christ, in themselves, afforded a sufficient amount of practical test.—I should like to see that.

Well, consider the facts narrated. Christ first appeared to certain women; then to Peter; then to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, holding with

them a long conversation. These three sets of witnesses all one by one reported their experience to the apostolic band, who were met within closed doors for fear of the Jews? What was the result? It is very plainly stated. First, as to Mary's report: "She went and told them . . . as they mourned and wept, and they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, *believed not*" (Mark xvi. 10, 11). Then as to the two that went to Emmaus, "They went and told it unto the residue, *neither believed* they them." "Afterward, he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and *upbraided them with their unbelief.*" Here it is with unbelief that the apostles at first received the reports of Christ's resurrection. How was this unbelief dispelled? By Christ's own appearance in their midst: and that appearance was not a passive appearance, as a ghost in a play, but an appearance as a living man, who invited them to satisfy themselves of his reality by test. Consider what is involved in the incident thus described: "He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I MYSELF: Handle me and see;* for a spirit hath not FLESH AND BONES *as ye see me have.* And when he had thus spoken, he *shewed* them his hands and his feet. And *while they yet believed not* for joy and wondered, he said unto them, HAVE YE HERE ANY MEAT? And they gave him a piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb. And he took it and did eat before them" (Luke xxiv. 38-43). What more practical evidence would it be possible for a dead man come to life, to give to his doubting friends than to offer himself to their handling, and eat food provided by them? This last point—eating before them food provided by themselves, is most

important. Men might distrust the evidence of their eyes and ears (though few men would), but if a dead friend come to life, not only shewed you marks of identity and suffered you freely to handle him, but ate something you brought out of your cupboard, WHICH something, after he was gone, WAS GONE, TOO, in what more palpable way would it be possible for such a dead friend to prove his reality? It would not be possible to suggest any mode of test that would be more practical and complete than that. Yet there was another test. A case was allowed to occur, and to have been put on record, apparently to meet the sceptical temper of men in after ages. I refer to the case of the apostle Thomas, who was absent at the first interview between Christ and his disciples. After the interview Thomas came, and the disciples told him of it, saying, "We have seen the Lord." Thomas received this intimation pretty much in the modern spirit. He said, in effect, "Except I can apply a practical test, I will not believe." His actual words were, "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*" Now for the sequel to this. "And after eight days again, his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in their midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, *Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side*: and be not faithless but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed" (John xx. 25-29). Here we have

Thomas, a typical sceptic, convinced on his own ground. The fact of such a case happening—the fact of Thomas taking a position of dogged unbelief till he should have the evidence of his senses, and then ceasing his unbelief when that evidence was presented—supplies the very element of the case which some people think is wanting.—The case is very strong.

Especially when you consider the simple nature of the fact to which the apostles bear witness. Are not very ordinary men able to report as to the evidence of their senses?—I do not know that I quite apprehend your meaning there.

Is not a very ordinary human being able to give evidence of what he sees?—In ordinary circumstances, of course.

There is no great depth of penetration required for a man to be sure whether he sees a thing or not?—It depends on the nature of the subject.

Well, the question of whether a man was seen on the street you would not consider a very recondite question, or one calling for special gifts or discernment?—It would depend.

If a policeman informed you he had seen your friend passing on the road, you would not think of doubting him his word?—Unless I knew my friend was somewhere else.

I don't know that you would doubt even in that case. I think it much more likely that you would fall back upon some supposition that your friend had unexpectedly returned?—Perhaps.

Especially, if not only the policeman, but the milkman, and your scullery maid, and not only they, but several persons in the street, all separately and independently, testified to the fact that your friend

had both walked down the road and had spoken to several persons?—I should of course think there was something in it.

Should you not consider the appearance of a person on the street and his talking with passers-by, the simplest of all subjects on which witnesses could give evidence?—There certainly could not be anything much simpler.

You would not consider that evidence on such a point would require any profound sort of qualification?—Of course not, but you are becoming needlessly precise, are you not?

I think not. The very evident matter in question is so generally and systematically denied or ignored that we require to be precise. That is just the nature of the fact the apostles bear witness to—that Christ, with whom they were on terms of close and loving intimacy, after being put to death by Pontius Pilate, appeared to them again alive, hale, and sound?—That is what they say.

And you admit they were able to judge?—Well, of course they knew whether they saw him or not, but is it not possible they might be mistaken?

I think not.—I have been mistaken myself often, when I supposed I have seen so-and-so in a crowd, or passing along on the street. It has turned out afterwards that it was not the person at all.

Aye, there might be a mistake in that case, where it is only one occasion that is in question, and only one witness (yourself), and where the thing is hurried and momentary; but where you see a person several times, and see him deliberately, and talk with him, and other friends are with you and see and converse with him also, there could be no mistake in such a case.—Well, of course, it would make a difference.

This was the state of the case with regard to Christ. As Paul expresses it, "Christ was seen *many days*" of them who accompanied him to Jerusalem—that is, his disciples—"seen of them *forty days*," as Luke has it (Acts i. 3), "shewing himself alive by *many infallible proofs*." Then Peter states that they, the disciples, "*ate and drank with them*, after he rose from the dead" (Acts x. 40, 41). Then there are accounts in the New Testament of several deliberate interviews at which Jesus talked with his disciples on the subject of his crucifixion, and of his resurrection, and of the course they were to pursue when he should leave them (see Luke xxiv., John xx. and Acts i.). The case does not admit of the supposition of possible mistake. You have admitted that the account is an authentic account, that is, an account actually written by the professed writers, who were disciples of Christ; and you have admitted their capability of judging of such a simple matter as whether they saw Christ or not. Now you have only to admit them truth-speaking men, and the evidence is established beyond contradiction. One man might be mistaken; though I fancy that one man would feel strongly enough convinced. But here are a number of men—eleven who stand officially related to the matter—men chosen as official witnesses—and not eleven only, but a multitude besides—"five hundred brethren at once," of whom Paul says, "the greater part remain unto this present (the time of his writing), but some are fallen asleep."—But does it not say that "some doubted" (Matt. xxviii. 17)?

Yes, at the first: and the statement that they doubted is really an element in the evidence of the most valuable kind? Why was it written that they doubted? Would a partizan writing

without regard to truth have recorded such a fact? And if not a partizan writing, it is a true writing, and therefore this follows: that it is *not only true* they doubted at first (that is, "some"), but that they afterwards believed. So then you have to consider this: What dispelled their doubts? The doubts were dispelled; for you find these same doubters foremost afterwards in the testimony for Christ's resurrection. What led to this dispelling of their doubts? What led them to believe? For they did believe, and suffered persecution for their belief? If you attach any weight to their doubts, you must attach weight to the dispelling of their doubts. Their doubts were natural in the presence of an unprecedented event, especially in view of Christ's crucifixion, which they had not thought possible, and which had shattered all their confidence. Not expecting him to die, now that they knew he was dead, they did not expect him to rise; and when he rose, it was natural it should be a theme of bewilderment to them, especially to the less quick-minded of them. It was natural that some should doubt; but all doubt afterwards fled which brings with it the conclusion that the facts, of which they were witnesses, were of a character to put an end to all doubt.—I admit the case is strong.

Is it not conclusive?—Well—yes, conclusive. I only wish all the world could see it, or that Christ himself would return to this bewildered scene and shew his reality by his actual presence.

Your wish will be granted in due time: for that is the next glorious part of the truth—that he is coming to heal the woes of mankind and fill the earth with glory.

May we be there to see it.—Amen.